

WOMEN AND VAMPIRE FICTION: TEXTS, FANDOM AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines what vampire fiction and vampire fandom offer to women and uses as a case study the accounts offered by women fans in New Orleans and Britain. Textual approaches to vampire fiction and femininity have largely proposed that just as the woman is punished by being positioned as passive and masochistic in the texts of *Dracula*, so too is the female viewer or reader of the texts. This thesis argues that such approaches are inadequate because they impose a singular ('Dracularesque') structure of meaning which both underestimates the variety of vampire fiction available and ignores the process of reading that women interested in the vampire figure engage in. It is argued, based on the women vampire fan's own textual interpretations, that the vampire can be read as a figure of pathos who elicits the fans' sympathy because of its predicament. It is further argued that this approach to the vampire appeals to the women because it brings into play a melodramatic structure which resonates with certain problematic experiences of feminine identity that are often suppressed in our culture and thus difficult to articulate. The figure of the vampire offers women fans both a channel for their creativity and a means of rebelling against the imposed norms of femininity.

It is a well-rehearsed position in theories of fandom that the activity that fans engage in is a form of rebellion or resistance. However, this thesis has suggested that the rebellion that the women fans engage in is a rebellion of the 'self' which is both filled with contradictions and limited to the personal sphere. Furthermore, through a comparison of two fan clubs, it will be argued that fandom is not automatically a culture of resistance and that different fan clubs position themselves in relation to two opposing, yet dominant, sets of values in the cultural field. Vampire fandom offers women the chance to construct alternative identities, but participation in fandom does not constitute resistance to dominant culture.

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INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the relationship between vampire fiction and the practices that women fans of this fiction engage in. Vampire fiction and vampire fandom are very particular aspects of popular culture and yet an analysis of these cultural forms and practices raises issues which have long concerned cultural studies. For instance, for the type of engaged and enthusiastic audience member (the fan) addressed in this research, the question of the text is significant. The approaches to the text can be seen to sit on opposite sides of a problematic binary which can be characterized on the one hand as ‘textual determinism’ and on the other as ‘readers’ resistance’. Textual analysis of vampire fiction has tended (in film and cultural theory) to reproduce the former. Chapter One offers a critical examination of the textually derived theories of the vampire’s cultural significance and challenges the supposition that the figure speaks to pre-existing (masculine) drives. In addition, the assumptions about audiences for the vampire that are made as a result of this perspective are questioned. The chapter draws on the widespread feminist critiques of those theories that neglect or marginalize women from discussions of textual and cultural meaning, but which have not been influential in conventional theories of horror. Furthermore, the chapter suggests that feminist approaches to women’s genres offer insights about the potential reading pleasures on offer to women in vampire fiction. This fiction has not traditionally been considered to be a ‘female’ form, but it is argued that literary theories of the gothic and feminist accounts of melodrama offer interpretations that are not male-centred and which emphasise historical and cultural specificity in meaning production rather than trans-historical psychic drives. Drawing on the arguments provided by audience studies that analyses of texts must be made sensitive to different audience groups who are located in culture in a variety of (often criss-crossing) specific ways, this thesis has concentrated on the female engagement with the vampire in order to address the absence of the female in existing textual analyses of horror.

Yet, while the textual determinism of much vampire and horror theory is challenged, this thesis also questions the opposite view that meaning only resides in audience interpretations. This view is particularly prevalent in theories of fandom, partly as a way to challenge the pathological view of fandom which dominates discourses about ‘the fan’. Chapter Two offers a critique of the small, but growing, field of fan studies which share a disregard for the texts that motivate fandom in favour of analyzing the ‘resistant’

readings that fans produce. It is suggested that this strategy allows academic analysis to sidestep difficult questions about the criterion by which judgements of texts might be made, and also to ignore the continuing issues about power and domination in the cultural field. This approach to the issue of cultural resistance is evidence of another binary opposition. In a move away from the dominant ideology thesis, fan studies contribute to a tendency to homogenize what people do in culture uniformly as acts of subversion. The chapter suggests that the trajectory of such an approach is the uncritical celebration of consumer capitalism as seen in some studies of media fans. However, this thesis rejects the properly discredited view that ordinary people are the dupes of mass culture and Chapter Two concludes by turning to Bourdieu's model of culture which offers a theory of power and domination in the cultural field that also asserts human agency, in order to offer an alternative approach to vampire fandom. Bourdieu's concepts of 'cultural capital' and 'distinction' can be found through out the studies of fandom as providing theoretical validation to claims that fandom is outside of and resistant to dominant culture. This chapter suggests however, that to deploy these concepts in the absence of Bourdieu's general analysis of the field of cultural production has produced a problematic relativism in fan theory which is at odds with Bourdieu's approach. Instead, this thesis is interested in how a model of fandom would look if Bourdieu's general and over-arching analysis of the dynamics of the cultural field were to be applied.

Because of the small size of this case study, involving a dozen in-depth interviews and limited observation of two vampire fan clubs, I will not be presenting my 'data' as *empirical* evidence of how fandom operates. Chapter Three of this thesis addresses the methodological rationale for this research as well as the limitations imposed by the case study approach. In essence, it is suggested that this case study provides a means of reflecting critically on existing theories and a way of refining key concepts and approaches. Furthermore, based as it is on women's accounts of their fandom, this case study offers insights into the relationship between the fans' gender and the appeal of the vampire, and also the significance of the practices these women engage in. But rather than limiting such an examination to the texts that fans produce, as is often the case in fan studies, this thesis analyses the full range of processes in this fandom, beginning with the fannish interpretations of the vampire and moving on to examine the key practices that the women fans engage in, which involve dressing the part of the vampire and

writing their own vampire fiction. Finally, this thesis offers an analysis of the structure and practices of the fan clubs to which many of the women are or have been members.

The variety of practices examined in this thesis has necessitated a level of interdisciplinarity because the practices that these fan engage in breach academic boundaries. Chapter Five, for instance, discusses the women fans' interpretations of vampire texts through a combination of gothic literary theory and feminist theories of melodrama. This is because both fan theory and Bourdieu's model of the cultural field offer little insight into the content of texts. In addition, fan theory is only concerned with how fans 'read against the grain', so I turned to approaches which could make sense of the women's interpretations which were not generally at odds with the authorial intent of their favourites. Gothic literary theory points out that the Dracula figure (which the female fans reject and which is central in film theory accounts of the vampire) is only a single version of the vampire myth which has long produced the more ambiguous vampires that populate the women fans' favourite texts. Significantly, literary approaches to the gothic continually make links between this cultural form and melodrama in terms of the structure of pathos and the use of excess to raise the 'unspeakable' in culture that centres on hidden injustice and oppression. Feminist analysis of melodrama in women's genres has provided similar arguments to explain why particular forms and genres may resonate with certain female experiences. These textual interpretations resonate with the woman's accounts of the vampire and thus facilitate explication.

This thesis has turned to a number of other relevant disciplines to examine the women's accounts of the other practices they are engaged in. Thus, theories of dress are applied to the fan accounts of dressing in 'vampiric black' in Chapter Seven, and feminist discussion of embodiment and the Internet frame the analysis of the women's writing about the vampire both on-line and on paper in Chapter Eight. But despite the variety of academic areas this thesis has turned to, there are important shared aspects to the methods of analysis of the scholars that this thesis has relied on in order to overcome the 'only-domination' versus 'only-resistance' binary which studies of fandom and subcultures seem subject to. Rather than circumventing the contradictions in cultural processes, a number of scholars focus on such ambiguities with an historically and culturally situated, materialist perspective that explains how phenomena contain opposing impulses. For instance, Wilson's analysis of the role the colour black in sartorial revolt demonstrates both reactionary and progressive tendencies through an

analysis of the conditions of emergence of the practices of dress as rebellion and is drawn on in Chapter Seven. Similarly, Punter's analysis of the gothic discussed in Chapter One and applied in Chapter Five demonstrates how the form's critique of Enlightenment certainties can simultaneously speak to the injustices of modernity and to a nostalgic regression. Furthermore, Walter Benjamin's dialectical approach to dreaming the future through images of the past frames a discussion of the women fans' own looking to the past which cannot be seen as simple nostalgia because of the otherness of the vampire figure with whom they travel. Chapter Six examines how the women fans relate the vampire to the self to suggest that conventional accounts of the concept of identification are an inadequate means of understanding this complex process. It will also be argued, however, that the very otherness of the vampire and its gothic pathos undermines any utopian notion about the figure's role in the fans' identity construction. Chapter Eight reappraises various feminist approaches to embodiment in order to examine the women's fan fiction which has a tendency to dwell on the ability of vampire to transcend the limits of the human body as well as a fascination with the corporeal moment of vampiric transformation. Rather than insisting that this fiction either reinscribes the mind/body dualism entrenched in western culture or, alternatively, offers subversive images of body transgressions, the chapter considers the way that popularised versions of 'second wave feminism' (with its own contradictions) can be found in the fan texts which do not fear the 'leaky' body that the vampire is said to represent, but which do, contradictorily, wish for bodily transcendence. In addition, the chapter analyses the processes of identity construction of women fans' writing vampires on the Internet. This discussion also suggests that theoretical 'either-or's' miss out on important contradictions. For instance, those cyber feminists who celebrate virtual space as the grounds for a new feminism have little to say about the sisters who do not have access to the on-line world. Women who do have access (including the women fans in this study) have certain class, national and educational privileges which means that they do not share every aspect of subordination with 'all women'. However, those theorists who claim that the Internet is *only* a tool available to privileged groups who want to shut out the messiness of real differences also ignore the complexities of identity.

Finally, Chapter Nine of this thesis provides an examination of two vampire fan clubs. Studies of fandom generally offer little analysis of the clubs that organize fandom and the simplified 'fandom-as-resistance' claims would be difficult to make if, as in this analysis of vampire fandom, the struggles and antagonisms between fan clubs (as well as

between fan club personnel and the ‘ordinary fan’) are examined. It may be that vampire fans are a particularly quarrelsome lot whose in-fights and power struggles are unique to this fandom, but it is unlikely. This chapter attempts to make sense of the antagonistic relations in the field of vampire fandom without pathologizing or valorising those involved. By drawing on Bourdieu’s analysis of the field of cultural production, the chapter opposes those theorists who use Bourdieu to argue that fandom stands outside of and challenges ‘mainstream’ culture. Bourdieu’s analysis proposes that all cultural positions are relational (dominant and subordinate) and as such there is no ‘standing outside’ of culture, and that the dominant end of the cultural field is made up of two antagonistic sets of cultural principles which, rather than producing a monolithic view of cultural worth, are constantly in struggle with each other. This ensures that while domination is a central impetus in the cultural field, no set of values reigns monolithically. Those who dominate the dominant end of the cultural field hold economic capital *and* hold to the notion that culture is for profit. They face continual challenges from the less dominant group who control the possession of cultural capital and who argue that art and literature should not be linked to commerce or politics, but should be produced for its own aesthetic worth. Bourdieu’s critique of this second position is that it is as hierarchical as the first in its own drive to restrict the acquisition of cultural capital through which such judgements of artistic worth are made. The analysis of vampire fan clubs offered in this chapter suggests that despite the way that dominant groups monopolize the two different capitals, the fan clubs are influenced by these ideas of cultural value even if they are often excluded from the actual possession of capital. It will be argued, then, that certain practices in vampire fandom can be seen as forms of rebellion against certain aspects of culture, but that this is a partial revolt more to do with the self than with society and that fan clubs themselves generally operate within accepted definitions of cultural worth, applying them to items produced within what has come to be called popular culture.

This thesis will attempt, then, to account for the simultaneous and contradictory impulses found in vampire fandom and the women who inhabit it. There will be an attempt to include in this analysis an understanding both of the women’s accounts of rebellion and of the practices that are not. Finally an alternative model of vampire fandom is suggested based on Bourdieu’s analysis of the field of cultural production, which seeks to understand vampire fandom’s place within culture. While this project was initially motivated by a wish to address the absence of female concerns in academic

accounts meaning of vampire fiction, the process of research with women vampire fans opened up further questions about the women's cultural practices and about the nature of fandom. This thesis therefore re-interprets vampire fiction with an emphasis on relating female fans' accounts of meaning to theoretical accounts, but also examines wider questions about the women's fandom, the practices they engage in, and the fan culture they are a part of.

CHAPTER ONE: THE VAMPIRE AND THE CRITICS: TEXTUAL APPROACHES TO THE SPECTATOR READER

Introduction

Since Byron wrote a fragment of a vampire tale at the Villa Diodati in 1816, there have been over 800 vampire novels written in the English language alone and in this century there have been over 200 vampire films made in Britain and the U.S. (Pirie, 1977; Melton, 1994; Skal, 1996). The vampire has clearly been an enduring figure in the Anglo-American cultural imagination and there has also been considerable academic interest in the vampire particularly after 1956 (Carter, 1988: 2). At least one critic argues that this proliferation of textual manifestations suggests that the vampire has ‘been used to mean many things’ (Dyer, 1988: 54), but the majority of the critical attention has put forward a variety of ways in which the vampire speaks to masculine concerns: either by constructing sadistic viewing pleasures; punishing threatening femininity; offering workings out of the Oedipal scenario or by echoing other socially constructed male concerns. As Nina Auerbach puts it, the ‘best-known experts on American popular horror insist that it has always been a boy’s game’ (Auerbach, 1995: 3). This concentration on masculinity has been matched by an absence of discussion of femininity in much of the work and film theory accounts of the vampire’s meaning have tended to ignore the proliferation of feminist challenges to the model of spectatorship which projects the female viewer onto female screen victims. Therefore, reasons why female audiences might engage with vampire texts have traditionally been ignored or theorised as masochistic viewing. This chapter will question both sets of claims through an examination of the main theoretical accounts of the vampire.

Furthermore, academic accounts of the cultural significance of the vampire and the figure’s meaning to specific audiences, have been based on the interpretation of texts. Thus the question of who identifies with whom in vampire fiction tends to be pursued through models of interpretation which construct gender in binary ways (male:active/female:passive) and which assume that spectatorship follows. This generally results in arguments about contaminated viewing pleasures, particularly for women. This chapter will therefore also discuss accounts of identification as it relates to

vampire fiction and it will be proposed that the processes at work may be more fluid than these accounts of identification permit.

This chapter will finally suggest that there are theoretical models which propose ways of analysing vampire texts that do not assume female masochism or passivity, but instead locate potential textual pleasures in terms of their resonances with the conditions of femininity. However, because these accounts are also based on the interpretation of texts, it will be argued that theoretical models for audiences of vampire fiction need to be put into contact with the accounts from viewers or readers of the fiction. This is not to suggest that the reader's account is somehow more authentic than the critical view, but to reflect on the models through which we make sense of the texts and their impact on specific audiences. This approach has been utilised in relation to other areas of popular fiction, particularly in feminist accounts of female genres and female audiences. However, on the terrain of horror, textual analysis as a method of interpretation on its own, remains primary.

This chapter will begin by examining one of the most influential paradigms of interpretation, which is based on Freudian psychoanalysis. Psychoanalytic theorists suggest that the vampire dramatises inner psychic drives of a sexual nature, such as the Oedipal scenario and incest (Astle, 1980; Bentley, 1982; Jackson, 1981; Jones, 1929; Moretti, 1988; Richardson, 1959; Twitchell, 1985). The implications of this masculine centred perspective on assumptions about the audience will be assessed. The chapter will then move on to discuss feminist re-readings of the vampire which suggest that the vampire, rather than dramatising the Oedipus complex, actually demonstrates western culture's deep seated hatred and fear of femininity (Craft, 1990; Creed, 1993; Dijkstra, 1996; Griffen, 1988; Neale, 1984; Roth, P. 1988; Senf, 1988; Showalter, 1990; Weiss, 1992; Weissman, 1988; Williams, 1984). Again, this perspective has been very influential, but, it will be suggested, rests on the common assumption that the vampire only dramatises masculine concerns.

While these two main perspectives propose that the vampire symbolises transhistorical human impulses that are primarily about sexuality, there have been numerous critics who suggest that what the vampire symbolises is historically specific and therefore variable (Auerbach, 1995; Carter, 1988; Carroll, 1990; Gelder, 1994; Gordon and Hollinger, 1997; Hatlen, 1988; Jancovich, 1992; Moretti, 1988; Nixon, 1988; Pirie, 1977; Roth L., 1984; Tudor, 1989; Zimmerman, 1984). It will be argued that it is useful to contextualize the potential meanings of the vampire historically,

particularly in the context of the considerable genre changes in vampire fiction in the last thirty years. But it will also be argued that these textual analyses continue to assume that the figure speaks to human identity in ways that are masculine or foreground masculine concerns.

This chapter will then move on to propose that the literary theory of the gothic offers a means of theorising potentially the significance of the vampire for a female audience (Punter, 1980 and 1996; Kilgour, 1995; Botting, 1996). It will be argued that gothic themes continue to be relevant to contemporary vampire fiction and particularly significant for a female audience is the link that is made between the gothic and melodrama. This chapter will draw on feminist accounts of the potential pleasures of melodrama for women and combine it with an analysis of the gothic to suggest that the privileging of masculine concerns in relation to the contemporary figure of the vampire is inadequate, and to propose an alternative which addresses the female audience.

This chapter will conclude by attempting to demonstrate that some theories which do account for the recent genre changes in ways which recognise female appeal, continue to offer problematic approaches to identification in which inescapable subject positions are said to be constructed. Thus, the necessity of examining the accounts of engagements with the vampire from female readers (who theoretically speaking are either absent or duped) will be highlighted.

Part One: Principal Accounts of the Meaning of the Vampire

Psychoanalysis and the vampire: text, sex and masculinity

Freudian psychoanalysis has been very influential in the analysis of the vampire. Ernest Jones in *On the Nightmare* (1929) offers one of the earliest readings of the vampire, proposing the vampire as a classic symbol of the Oedipal family romance. Jones draws on Freud's 'Oedipus Complex' (1925) to suggest that a belief in, and fear of, the vampire stems from the combination of love, hate and guilt which is attached to the incestuous love for one parent (the mother) and hatred for the other (the father). The vampire is therefore 'a transformed projection of infantile sexual anxieties' (Jones, 1991: 320). This form of analysis of textual meaning has been applied to an enormous variety of popular cultural texts and has drawn criticism from considerable numbers of feminist critics (Byars, 1991; Creed, 1993; Clover, 1992; Gammon and Marshment, 1988; Gledhill, 1978; Modleski, 1988; Pribram, 1988; Stacey, 1994). One of the central

concerns is the uneven approach to gender, because, of course, it is the male child who is examined in this fable of desire. The desires, loves and hates of the female are singularly absent from such Freudian accounts.

Nevertheless, many theorists have drawn on Jones' early account to explain the phenomena of Count Dracula (Astle, 1980; Bentley, 1988; Richardson, 1959; Twitchell, 1985). Richardson, for example, suggests that the novel *Dracula* (1897) poses two father figures in the characters of the Count and Dr. Van Helsing. Van Helsing is the good father who provides guidance for youthful masculinity in the shape of the four young members of the 'Crew of Light': Harker, Holmswood, Seward and Morris. Dracula, on the other hand, is the evil father who keeps all of the women to himself. The good father steers youthful masculinity to the destruction of the bad father, ending his sexual monopoly. For Richardson then, like Jones, it is the male who is addressed in vampire fiction.

Twitchell offers the most candid Freudian account of the mental operations at work for the audience of the vampire. Twitchell too suggests that the killing off of Dracula by the Crew of Light represents the killing off of the father by the sons. But for Twitchell, the myth is a lesson in proper sexual conduct for teenagers. He argues that vampire tales 'are really formulaic rituals coded with precise social information needed by the adolescent audience' (1985: 7). Twitchell argues that Dracula is a 'sexual violator' who defiles young women and that we can best understand this assault from 'the vantage point of the adolescent audience' (136). For Twitchell this scenario offers double identificatory pleasures for the male adolescent; 'the primal young male audience witnesses the older man defile the virgin [...] while at the same time imagining himself to be that powerful man' and also identifies with the 'youthful throng that seeks his overthrow' (136). Thus the vampire myth offers active, aggressive and sadistic identificatory pleasures for the male reader or viewer.

Although Twitchell has a tendency to conflate 'the audience' and 'the male audience', unlike other Freudian theorists he does have something to say about the female audience. While the male identifies both with the vampire and his hunters, the female audience, like the female victim, secretly wants to be violated and 'encourages her own defloration' (136). The reason, Twitchell tells us, that the female desires the vampire's violation, is because she desires genital sexuality but fears that she may get pregnant and be 'cast out of the tribe' (136):

and so what does the vampire do but remove all fear. He comes in the dead of night; he knows exactly what to do; he will not make her pregnant [...] all she has to do is be a bit interested and he'll do the rest (136).

Twitchell is quite clear that the 'vampire is a projection of the self for the male and the victim is a projection of the self for the female' (137). He also slips from discussing *Dracula* to a general discussion of the vampire's meaning because his Freudian perspective permits him to make such ahistorical generalizations. He makes the (untested) assumption, common in Freudian cultural analysis, that the male has a sadistic psyche and the female has a masochistic relation to her own body and sexuality; that passivity and the desire for violation are part of the feminine psyche. As Gelder puts it, '[h]is account finally settles on a familiar gender distinction where boys are active and sadistic and girls are passive victims' (Gelder, 1994: 96). Freudian analyses suggest then, that the vampire myth is about establishing proper sexual behaviour that is predicated on the establishment of fixed sexual difference which teaches boys that they are active and that girls are passive.

In addition, Twitchell has no means of explaining the possibility of female audiences 'identifying' with the vampire. Theoretical certainty that males identify with males and females with females has been challenged in Clover's analysis of identification in the modern slasher film subgenre of horror. Clover suggests that the adolescent male audience identifies not with the monster violator, but instead with the 'Final Girl' (1992: 35) who is a kind of victim/hero. Clover argues that the 'Final Girl' is a 'double for the adolescent male' and this identification allows males to experience masochistic pleasures but at a safe enough distance to leave male competence undisturbed. Clover argues that filmmakers seem to know better than film critics 'that gender is less a wall than a permeable membrane' (46) and she argues that while horror at one level tells us about sexual difference and implies male superiority at the same time 'it repeatedly contemplates mutations and slidings whereby women begin to look a lot like men [...] men are pressured to become like women [...] and some people are impossible to tell apart' (16). The implication is that audience identification in horror is more complex than the gendered active(male-sadistic)/passive(female-masochistic) binary account of identification discussed above. However, Clover's disruption of the notion of the sadistic masculine gaze is unusual in feminist theories of horror. Feminist critiques of Freudian gender bias has not led to an abandonment of the idea that horror generally, and

the vampire more specifically, is constructed as a result of male anxiety or sadism. The following section will examine various feminist analyses of the vampire in order to question the relative lack of consideration accorded to issues of female engagements with the vampire.

Feminism and the vampire: femininity as 'monstrous'; as 'lack'; as 'castrator'

Various forms of feminist cultural theory, critical theory and film theory have inspired a trenchant re-interpretation of the vampire which challenges traditional Freudian accounts. Neale, (1987) for example, draws on Mulvey's landmark reinterpretation of psychoanalysis for film theory to argue that the vampire's monstrosity is a signal of 'otherness' and difference. According to Neale, the difference that the horror film centrally addresses is that of sexual difference by raising male fears that female sexual difference is a form of castration or 'lack.' The vampire appears as monstrous because it is acting as a fetish to assuage male castration anxieties, whereby monstrosity is a disavowal of feminine 'lack'. For Neale then, the vampire is a fetish 'simultaneously representing and disavowing the problem of sexual difference at stake' (44).

A number of other theorists concur that the vampire is representative of male fears of female sexuality. For instance, Dijkstra (1996) agrees that the vampire represents the female body in a distorted and monstrous form. He argues that the vampire demonstrates the way that western culture simultaneously hates, fears and fetishizes the female body, for even when the vampire is nominally a male figure, it translates into a male-generated fear of 'woman as vampire' (7). Dijkstra argues that we should reject the 'mass media's lure of "evil sister" stereotyping' (443) and that we should begin the 'daunting task of exorcising the vampires of misogyny from our imagination' (7).

From a different angle, but still offering a feminist reinterpretation of psychoanalysis, Phyllis Roth (1988) rereads the existence of the Oedipal Scenario in vampire fiction. Roth argues that while *Dracula* is on the face of it a novel of 'Oedipal rivalry', this only organises a far more important substructure to the novel which articulates a hatred for the mother. For Roth, Lucy and Mina stand for the maternal in a story which is structured around their victimisation and (in Lucy's case) destruction. Meanwhile the reader is invited to identify with the male aggressors and their violent attacks on the women, for what is articulated in the text is the 'desire to destroy the threatening mother' (65).¹

While these readings of *Dracula* are compelling, they share important problems with Freudian readings of the vampire myth. As in Freudian psychoanalysis, feminist psychoanalytic interpretations of the vampire have a tendency to read *Dracula* monolithically. By concentrating on the *Dracula* story and offering their analysis of this story as an explanation of the meaning of *all* vampire tales, psychoanalytic accounts condense the vampire myth into *Dracula*, reducing the rich variation of vampire fiction (and indeed, variations in the reproductions of *Dracula*) to a single figure and a fixed set of meanings. Both Freudian and feminist psychoanalytic theorists, then, have chosen to universalise a tale which some critics suggest is at odds with other tales of the crypt. Auerbach, for example, argues that *Dracula* actually destroyed the intimacy between vampire and 'victim' prevalent in previous depictions of the vampire (1997: 11). Botting concurs, arguing that '[w]resting diabolical ambivalence and agency from [...] a whole host of other tales [...] Stoker's novel subordinates feminine sexuality to a masculine perspective in which women serve as objects of exchange and competition between men' (146). Psychoanalytic readings of the vampire can ignore difference and changes within the vampire genre and concentrate on the masculine centred tale of *Dracula*, because for Freudians, the (male) Oedipus Complex is universal and transhistorical, and for feminist psychoanalysts, the patriarchal unconscious (of which the Oedipal scenario is said to be an expression) is similar, universally in dread of the threat caused by the female 'castrated' form. Thus one can read in one example of the vampire myth its general masculine meanings across time, cultures and histories.

There are, however, a few feminist accounts which do not see the vampire as a manifestation of castration anxiety and these theorists usually have something to say about female spectatorship. Linda Williams (1984) and Barbara Creed (1993), for example, both take issue with those theorists who propose that the vampire functions to alleviate male fears of castration. Williams suggests that the monster does not signify feminine lack and does not provoke a fear of castration in the male audience. Instead, she suggests, the real trauma for boys is that the monster is *not* castrated and mutilated the way he would be if his penis were taken away; the fear is actual, palpable difference. The patriarchal unconscious only constructs the woman as castrated in order to disguise the fact that she is different-to-male rather than lacking-male. The vampire then, like other monsters, threatens to expose the fictional way the patriarchal unconscious constructs femininity.

Furthermore, Williams is concerned with what the vampire figure might mean for women. She argues that there is a 'strange sympathy and affinity' that often develops between the monster and the girl which may be 'less an expression of sexual desire and more a flash of sympathetic identification' (Williams, 1984: 87). For Williams the vampire is powerful in a way that is different to phallic sexuality and she is interested in how this version of difference might resonate with female spectators. She suggests that, like the screen female, there is recognition by female spectators of their similar status to vampire and the threat that this poses to vulnerable masculinity. Yet, while Williams's analysis crucially brings the female spectator back into view in a body of interpretation which largely ignores her, the possibilities for female spectatorship remain rather limited and ultimately turn upon patriarchal notions of femininity. Williams argues that the vampire is in the end a masculine distortion of femininity, that both are considered to be 'biological freaks' and that it is 'a particularly insidious form of the many mirrors patriarchal structures of seeing hold up to the woman' (88). From this perspective, female identification with the vampire is an acceptance of a distorted version of femininity.

Creed also breaks with Freudian accounts of the Castration Complex in her analysis of the vampire as the 'monstrous feminine'. Instead she draws on Kristeva's theory of abjection to suggest that female monsters (whether they are actually female or symbolically female like the vampire) horrify their audiences in ways very different to male monsters. She suggests, like a number of theorists (Moretti, 1988; Craft, 1990; Case, 1991), that the vampire is symbolically female even if it is nominally depicted as male. The female monster is horrifying because it raises the 'abject' nature of the maternal body. The vampire, like the maternal body, is not clean and pure and closed. Instead, it transgresses boundaries and disrupts ideas about where the body starts and ends. Furthermore, according to Creed, the vampire's 'blood letting fangs' provokes fear, not of the castrated female but of the 'mythic vagina dentata' (72). Furthermore, the biting and sucking of the vampire suggests that it is an agent of castration as well an image of the abject maternal body. In fact, Creed argues that the vampire is the archaic mother and a castrating mother and thus the vampire myth depicts the pre-symbolic maternal world as abject.

Although Creed argues that female abjection is produced to help found the patriarchal order, her analysis does not position femininity as 'passive' or 'absent' as in much psychoanalytic theory. Her vampire may be symbolically female and abject, but it is

also an active agent. Furthermore, she insists that horror does not construct femininity and masculinity as polar opposites in relation to castration, for both sexes are constructed as castrated and castrator. Thus, Creed suggests that horror is more open to the exploration of both male and female anxieties about sexual difference than had previously been thought. Like Williams, Creed is interested in what this means for the female spectator and speculates on the appeal of horror for a female audience by asking, 'Does she recognize herself in the figure of the monstrous feminine? To what extent might the female spectator feel empowered when identifying with the female castrator?' (155). Creed, like Williams, usefully opens up what had been a closed theoretical space where the female spectator or reader may identify with the vampire rather than the victim. Also, Creed shares with Clover a model of spectatorship which disrupts the linear idea of identification in which the screen male (active and sadistic) is the equivalent of the male audience and the screen female (passive and masochistic) is indistinguishable from the female audience. Creed argues that traditional accounts of identification are based on the mistaken notion that 'only phallic masculinity is violent and that femininity is never violent - not even in the imagination' (155). For Creed, this simply reproduces patriarchal notions of feminine passivity. Creed and Williams challenge the idea that the female audience must identify with the female victim and re-read the vampire myth in ways that offer non-masochistic spectator positions for women. However, both still approach feminine spectator positions as theoretical possibilities rather than processes involving empirical audiences. While it is not being suggested that theoretical readings of genres can offer no insight into audience engagements, these theorists' emphasis on the way the fiction constructs 'feminine subject positions' becomes unanimous with their speculations on the pleasures of the female audience, without considering the need to test the presumed correlation. The different readings that women might make of the myth are not considered, nor why some women may have a stronger interest in vampire fiction than others. Furthermore, feminist psychoanalytic film theory has a history of concerns to do with its own conditions of emergence and these concerns have led to foregrounding questions of sexual difference. As Annette Kuhn comments, 'the interests of feminist film theory and film theory in general converge [...] in a shared concern with sexual difference' (340). Thus 'spectator positions' are cast in terms of the concerns in film theory to do with the questions of sexual difference. It remains to be seen how important such questions are for female audiences of the vampire who are generally not embroiled in such debates within film theory.

Psychoanalysis, as a method of analysing what the vampire means to its audiences, whether traditional Freudian or feminist reinterpretations, is reductive because it assumes the homogeneity of the genre and of the audience. Tudor puts the matter succinctly when he argues that the universal explanations of horror offered by psychoanalysis:

are reductive in as much as they ‘explain’ horror by reference to seemingly immutable characteristics of the genre or its consumers, while the mechanism of its appeal that they propose is one predicated upon the gratification of pre-established needs (Tudor, 1997: 460).

Instead Tudor suggests that it is important to question the assumption of homogeneity in horror and rather than offering universal accounts of meaning, historicize and particularise the possible pleasures for audiences.

Society and the vampire: changing fears in changing times.

There are a number of accounts of the meaning of the vampire in popular culture which reject universal explanations in favour of situating meaning in historically specific ways. This body of work is difficult to summarise because of its tendency to refuse ahistorical or generalised explanations of the appeal of the vampire. However, theorists writing from this perspective, despite their differing accounts of meaning, do share a concern with drawing thematic links between vampire texts and concerns circulating in specific social contexts. Tudor offers a summary of the character of such work in horror generally, but it is equally relevant to vampire fiction. Tudor argues that ‘particularist’ accounts tend to operate in three ways; by linking ‘specific features of the genre and aspects of agents’ everyday social experience’; by focusing on long-term genre transformations to ‘demonstrate their congruence with more macroscopic currents of social change’; or by establishing relations between ‘horror discourses and the typical structures of social interaction which they presuppose and to which they contribute’ (1997: 458). Discussions of the vampire’s specific social appeal often blend aspects of these approaches with the advantage of examining and theorising differences and changes in the structure of the genre. This challenges the psychoanalytic insistence on vampire’s articulation of pre-existing psychosexual drives. Important to this approach is the recognition that genres change over time and therefore ‘sustain differently constructed audiences’ (Tudor, 1997: 456).

Lane Roth (1984) and Ken Gelder (1994), for example, offer different approaches for analysing the discernible changes in the vampire film genre and the relationship these

shifts may have with broader social changes. Roth compares the changing visual and narrative codes between the two vampire films *Nosferatu* (1922) and *Horror of Dracula* (1958) in order to demonstrate the films' thematic links with the prevalent, but differing anxieties of the time of each film's making. *Nosferatu* draws on Expressionist aesthetics in order to depict a prism-like distortion of anxieties related to the instability of Weimar Germany. The struggle between tyranny and chaos facing Germany at the time is explored through 'stylised abstraction' in order to be palatable to a 'nervous society' (1984: 247). The inevitability of tyranny is depicted through the lack of effective, aggressive, male challenge to the tyrant Count, while the necessity for sacrifice is depicted as feminine through the character of Ellen who lures the Count into her bedroom just as dawn is breaking in order that he may perish in the sun's rays.

For Roth it is significant that the mystical dissolve which ends Dracula's reign of terror is replaced in *Horror of Dracula* (1958) with visceral death in gruesome detail. Sacrifice is replaced by a violent battle between the Count and Van Helsing. The vampire in *Nosferatu* (1922) is odious, personifying 'pestilence and the corruption of tyranny' (250). In *Horror of Dracula*, he is 'well-mannered and cultured, and looks proverbially tall, dark and handsome' (250). Roth argues that this filmic and narrative difference points to the different worries raised by each film. *Nosferatu* tells its audiences that tyranny may be ugly, but it is inevitable, whereas *Horror of Dracula* raises anxieties about promiscuity and subversive sex. The model for the implied audience, then, is one which is constructed by specific historical moments and cultural discourses to which the films' narratives speak.

Roth has more to say about the appeal of *Horror of Dracula* (1958) to its audience than *Nosferatu* (1922). The former was produced at a time in British social history when political and sexual mores were under threat, as was Britain's traditional class structure. For Roth, *Horror of Dracula* shared important themes with films such as *Room at the Top* (1959) for both were expressions of 'Angry Young Men' (251). The appeal of *Horror of Dracula* turns on the sexual prowess of the Count in contrast to the protagonists of British realist films of the 1950s. Roth draws on Gerald Mast to suggest that the only talent of the hero of the social realist films of the 1950s was loving, which is not a talent rewarded by society. Roth argues that the vampire conversely was shown to excel in this area:

Christopher Lee's portrayal of a virile vampire represents the power of sexual promiscuity in the late 1950's to subvert the

traditional British class structure. Although Dracula is an aristocrat, the probable audience composition for *Horror of Dracula* was more working class than aristocrat, and audience members may have identified with him as a hero (Roth, 1984: 252).

Roth usefully offers an account of the vampire's meaning which recognises genre changes and attempts to make sense of them. He proposes an interesting link between differing deployment of filmic codes, prevalent social anxieties and how films might resonate with audiences' experiences of those social discourses. However, he discusses the relationship between cultural production and the impact of social transformation as if it affected only one section of the chafing, youthful population of the 1950s - young, working class men. Angry young men may identify with Dracula's subversive sexuality, but young women exist in Roth's account only as symbolic of intensified consumerism or as a polarisation with the 'hero' Dracula in terms of 'gender, value and texture' (250). The concerns of 'the audience' and the concerns of the 'angry young men' are collapsed together; the male audience becomes 'the' audience. Whether or not young working class men may have identified with Dracula's 'salacious savagery' (251) is not in dispute. Instead, the problem with this account, like so many other critical interpretations, is the lack of any attention to the potential pleasures (or even existence) of a female audience. The vampire did speak to (at least some) teenage girls in the 1950s as is evidenced in Nina Auerbach's account of her own interest in this figure as a teenage girl in the conformity of 1950s America. Auerbach tells us:

we had found a talisman against a nice girl's life. Vampires were supposed to be a menace to women, but to me at least, they promised protection against a destiny of girdles, spike heels and approval (1995: 4).

Gelder's approach to genre transformations is similar to Roth, but includes more up to date films and novels. He also theorises genre transformations in a more systematic manner implying a further challenge to psychoanalytic insistence on the monolithic meanings of *Dracula* (although Gelder does not draw this conclusion himself and uses psychoanalysis in small doses). He argues that the many incarnations of *Dracula*, rather than telling us the same story over and over again, engage in a 'process of cultural remodelling' (1994: 92). Gelder draws on a combination of Neale's analysis of genre and Bennett and Woollacott's analysis of the Bond figure as a floating signifier to suggest that like Bond, Dracula differs from his original literary source and that the figure's *variability* is as important as structural and iconic repetitions in the film genre.

Gelder analyses a number of vampire films to explore the way the genre has responded to specific social discourses and has thus evolved. Like Roth, Gelder argues that *Nosferatu* prefigures the anti-Semitism of Nazi Germany and that Hammer films from the 1950s were concerned with increased physicality. But he also examines a range of more recent filmic incarnations of the vampire from *The Brides of Dracula* (1960) to *Near Dark* (1987) and *The Lost Boys* (1987), as well as the best selling novels of Anne Rice, Stephen King and others.

Gelder suggests that *The Brides of Dracula*, *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys* are concerned with dysfunctional families and troublesome youth culture, so relevant to post war culture in both Britain and the U.S., but that each film offers different solutions to the management of these issues. *The Brides of Dracula* presents a youthful vampire who preys on the young female inhabitants of a girl's academy. The father figure of Academy is depicted as overly strict and ogre-like, and thus ineffectual in the management of youth. Dr. Van Helsing on the other hand is depicted as the good father who resolves the family crisis through his paternal concern and understanding, mediating between 'the strictness of the parents (which doesn't work) and the loose morals of the young (which get them into trouble); his role [...] is one of *management*' (Gelder, 1994: 74). In *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys*, there is also a representation of the vulnerability of the family, in both cases because the family is incomplete. Both films focus on the transformation of the central protagonist and centre on his trauma at becoming a vampire, which involves moving away from the respectable family and towards the lawlessness of the cult. However, Gelder argues that what is advocated in these films is not 'management from above' in the figure of an adult but 'self management' as the teenagers struggle to reassert their non-vampiric identities. Gelder argues that the shift from management to self-management is registered in the development of narrative conventions; the early film plot turning on the rescue of the potential victim by a 'good' father figure, while the later plots focus on the autonomous actions of the partially vampirised male protagonists. Finally, according to Gelder, both *Near Dark* and *The Lost Boys* are films concerned with the 'irruption of male adolescent heterosexuality' (105). The vampirised boys eventually reject the lawlessness of the vampire cult and return to their proper masculine roles, both in terms of their sexuality and in terms of heading 'complete' families.

Gelder has developed an interesting means of theorising and discussing genre transformations by combining Neale's genre theory with Bennett and Woollacott's notion of a cultural icon as a floating signifier. However, while Gelder produces compelling readings of these films, what is highlighted again is the male story. It may well be that these films operate as tales of masculine development, but there may be other codes at work alongside this which cannot be so exclusively theorised as male. In *The Lost Boys*, for example, (as Gelder notes) Michael's heterosexuality and masculinity are open to question. It could be argued that Michael (with his long, flowing black hair) is feminised in relation to the leader of the gang who seems to demonstrate greater strength and mental power. Part of the pleasure in Michael's defeat of the vampire may lie in a sexually ambiguous figure getting the better of one who is depicted as more traditionally male. Alternatively, the romance of the vampire gang may have such a pull that potential audiences wonder at Michael's hesitation. The point is, that women have taken up their proportion of seats at vampire movies and yet hardly figure at all in accounts of meaning. In order to redress this balance, I decided to interview women who are fans of the vampire figure and Chapter's Five and Six of this thesis concentrate on the interpretations and accounts of engagement with vampire fiction from the women who participated in this study. But unlike other studies of fans, which concentrate on fans' interpretations to the point of neglecting the texts which fans find so appealing (discussed in Chapter Two), this thesis considers that there is a relationship between the structure of texts and fannish interpretations which is worth investigating.

Furthermore, there has been a shift towards an overtly sympathetic depiction of the vampire in the popular novels of Somtow and McKee Charnas and the best selling novels of Anne Rice, as well as blockbuster films such as *Bram Stoker's Dracula* (1993) and *Interview With the Vampire* (1994) and many of the theoretical accounts discussed above can tell us little about these sympathetic depictions of the vampire. But this cannot be explained by suggesting that these new vampire tales have made a decisive break with past depictions of the myth, for, as I will argue below, this 'new' sympathetic vampire has a long gothic ancestry which has been neglected by film theory. In order to consider the sympathetic vampire figure it is necessary to turn to a body of theory which does discuss it and for this reason the following section will turn to literary theories of the gothic which tends to concentrate on the ambiguity of all of our monsters, including the vampire. Also, (interestingly) there are consistent considerations of questions of

femininity from this body of work and it can therefore offer insights into the possible meanings of the myth for women.

Part Two: An Alternative Approach to the Vampire: Femininity and Gothic Melodrama

Genre: the changing face of the vampire

Despite the immense academic concentration on a ‘Dracularesque’ vampire there has been a discussion of the ‘new’ sympathetic vampire coming from a small number of theorists who have pointed to a further shift in genre conventions in the late twentieth century. Margaret Carter, for example suggests that ‘[t]oday, creators of fictional vampires often choose the Romantic path of identification with the “alien” supernatural being, rather than with the superstitious majority bent on excluding and destroying him or her’ (1988: 28). She argues that late twentieth century America finds itself in a mood to see the vampire’s traditional outsider status, along with its sexual prowess, appealing. Contemporary American society, according to Carter, glorifies and even rewards symbolic outsiders such as the rock star, thus; ‘[a]s rebellious outsider, as persecuted minority, as endangered species, and as member of a different “race” that legend portrays as sexually omniscient, the vampire makes a fitting hero for late twentieth-century popular fiction’ (9). Carol Senf similarly suggests that ‘the changing attitudes towards authority and toward rebellion against authority have [...] led to a more sympathetic treatment of the vampire’ (1988b: 150).

However, the sympathetic treatment of the vampire is not entirely new. There has long been a (gothic) strand within vampire fiction that alludes to the pathos of the vampire, and blurs the boundary between vampire ‘predator’ and human ‘victim’. A number of theorists have pointed to the sympathetic treatment of Sheridan Le Fanu’s vampire in *Carmilla* (1872) (Auerbach, 1997; Weiss, 1992; Zimmerman, 1984) and Zimmerman, for instance, suggests that the sympathetic female vampire is a ‘gothic fantasy archetype’ (156). Lord Byron, (1816), John Polidori (1891), James Malcolm Rider (1845) and Sheridan Le Fanu (1872) all conjure earlier incarnations of the vampire than Dracula: gothic versions of the vampire, steeped in pathos, that offer forbidden friendship. In discussing this vampire figure, Auerbach suggests that ‘Carmilla speaks for the warier male vampires who came before her. Her vampirism, like theirs, is an interchange, a sharing, an identification, that breaks down the boundaries of familial

roles and the sanctioned hierarchy of marriage' (12). She also points out that vestiges of this gothic vampire are found in numerous twentieth-century films from Carl Dreyer's *The Vampyre* (1932), to Roy Ward Baker's *The Vampire Lovers*, (1970), to Ridley Scott's *The Hunger* (1983).

A number of gothic literary theorists similarly discuss the continuing influence of gothic conventions and themes in contemporary popular narratives (Botting, 1996; Kilgour, 1995; Punter, 1980 and 1996). Botting, for example, argues that many of the anxieties addressed in the gothic novel reappear in the twentieth century. He suggests however, that their appearance 'is more diverse, a diffusion of Gothic traces among a multiplicity of different genres and media' (13). Botting suggests that while the cinema is the 'true locus of Gothic' (14), it also exerted an influence on popular literary forms. Punter agrees and argues that it is not simply Hollywood's reliance on gothic literary sources in their horror production cycles, but that there are other more important aspects. For example, Punter points to the 'genuine complexity of their attitudes towards the monstrous' (1980: 348) and proposes that, not only were film producers familiar with 'ambiguous emotional effects', but that there are also 'strong veins of unexpected sympathy' (348) running through their depictions of the monster. Thus the 'new' sympathetic vampire can be seen to draw on a tradition of sympathetically portrayed monstrosity from its gothic roots through to its transformations on the Hollywood screen. However, these vampires are not simply a repetition of the old, for as Neale reminds us in his discussion of genre, 'repetition is never simply the return to the identical and difference is never the eruption of something absolutely new' (1982:). The rest of this chapter will therefore examine the 'new' vampire through a discussion informed by gothic theory and it will also assess the differences between this figure and its gothic predecessors.

The most popular of the 'new' sympathetic vampires are those of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*. The texts are constructed as first person narratives from the point of view of the two central vampires, Louis and Lestat as is the film *Interview With The Vampire* (1995), which is based on the first *Vampire Chronicle* (1976) and later, Armand.² The result is that the vampires, rather than signifying a fear of the dangerous and disavowed, are presented as sympathetic and 'knowable' outsiders. Like many other late twentieth-century vampires, rather than embodying evil and 'otherness', Louis and Lestat are depicted in ways that seem to blend the characteristics of the Gothic heroine, locked in circumstances outside of her control with those characteristics of what Kilgour

terms the 'Gothic hero-villain' (Kilgour, 1995: 3), a rebel and rogue; a fatal man operating outside the limits of social norms. The 'new' vampire is thus a reincarnation, albeit with significant transformation, of gothic figures from the past. It is a pathos-filled creature, locked in circumstances beyond its control (like the gothic heroine), but it also has preternatural strength and longevity to aid its predicament (like the gothic hero-villain). Thus the 'new' vampire can be characterised as a gothic- /hero/victim/villain, a blend of gothic conventions set on a contemporary stage.

The popularity of the sympathetic vampire (cf. Melton, 1994; Skal, 1996) has not deterred some theorists from bemoaning the demise of the masculine centred Dracula tale. Zanger for example, laments the emergence of the 'new' vampire because it demotes the vampire from a 'magical, metaphysical "other"', towards the metonymic vampire as social deviant [...] eroding in the process of transformation many of the qualities that generated its original appeal' (17). Zanger identifies a number of important changes in the genre which he equates with an undesirable shift in the vampire's status from 'magical to mundane' (19). Where once Dracula occupied the role of cosmic evil, an unambiguously Satanic figure in the universe of good and evil, the 'new' vampire has become humanised, destroying its original mythic status. Zanger identifies two central shifts in the genre which effect the vampire's deposition from metaphysical status to a mere outsider. First, the new vampire 'tends to be communal, rather than solitary as was Dracula' (18). Instead of the appropriately narrow range of emotions displayed by Dracula - 'hunger, hate, bitterness, contempt' (22) - the new vampires' 'communal condition permits them to love, to regret, to doubt, to question themselves, to experience interior conflicts and cross-impulses - to lose, in other words, that monolithic force possessed by Dracula, his unalterable volition' (22). The second change rued by Zanger is the domesticating and individualising of vampiric motivation. The vampire's acts are now 'expressions of individual personality and condition' rather than 'cosmic conflict between God and Satan' (18). As far as Zanger is concerned, '[t]his new, demystified vampire might as well be our next door neighbour' (19). In other words, the 'new' vampire has ties of family and friendship, which locate it (problematically as far as Zanger is concerned) in the realm of the emotions. This is a humanised terrain, which is more ambiguous in its depiction of good and evil. It is interesting to note that Zanger regrets those changes in the genre which shift it into areas that are conventionally associated with women's fiction and with feminine (and therefore devalued) reading pleasures; the depiction of emotional states and the experience of interior conflicts.

Zanger's criticisms sound remarkably like those regretting the move from what are considered to be traditional masculine pleasures (although these are yet to be tested, particularly in relation to the large contemporary male readership of the new vampire) to feminine ones. Zanger argues that by 'providing a comprehensible, domestic' (25) vampire, the new narratives provide an experience that readers and viewers engage in 'not voyeuristically, as in the case of *Dracula*, but as conjoiners and communicants' (25). While these genre shifts contaminate the true essence of the myth for Zanger, he has, despite his argument, identified many of the themes that the women fans in this study point to in discussing their own favourites. Although Zanger may be critical of the domestication of the vampire, gothic theory points to the emergence and continuance of gothic conventions in horror in a way that poses (theoretically) valid potential feminine pleasures, in particular by identifying close links between the gothic and the conventions of melodrama, in terms of their emergence as forms (Punter, 1980; Brooks, 1976) as well as their handling of themes that may resonate with the experience of femininity. The following section will argue that there continues to be a close link between melodrama and the gothic in the depiction of the 'new' sympathetic vampire. Furthermore, many feminists have examined a variety of manifestations of melodrama from the women's picture to soap opera to explore the relationship between narrative pleasures and femininity. The following section will consider the melodramatic depiction of the vampire in the light of the insights from this body of feminist scholarship and will turn to a discussion of both the gothic and feminist analysis of melodrama in order to examine the potential for female engagement with the 'new' vampire genre.

Vampires, the gothic and melodrama

Many literary theorists suggest that gothic fiction, despite its conventional settings in subterranean spaces and ruined castles, is, in its form, 'discontinuous and involuted' (Kosofsky Sedgwick, 1980: 9). It is considered to be incoherent, fragmented and lacking in unity. As Kilgour puts it, '[m]ade up of assorted bits and pieces, gothic novels often seem to disintegrate into fragments, irrelevant digressions, set-pieces of landscape description' (1995: 5). However, literary theorists of the gothic agree that the self-contradictory ambivalence that marks the gothic form are in keeping with its emergence. (Botting, 1996; Brooks, 1976; Kilgour, 1995; Punter, 1980). The gothic novel emerged from the tumultuous eighteenth century and has roots in the Romantic movement. Both responded to the contradictions of an epoch whose 'official culture' of the Enlightenment

was dominated by the concepts of 'reason', 'rationality' and 'progress'. Yet it was also a society 'which was becoming aware of injustice in a variety of different areas, and which doubted [...] the ability of eighteenth-century social explanations to cope with the facts of experience' (Punter, 1980: 127). Punter argues that the gothic novel emerged as a response to the attempt to bring 'all things under rational control' (27), where the reliance on reason 'may appear to remove mystery, but only at the expense of outlawing large expanses of actual experience, the experience of the emotions, the passions' (26). The gothic novel, he argues, shows an awareness of that which is made incomprehensible by an 'all-dominant reason' and an 'over-consistent view of man' (27). According to Punter, it was because reason was to explain all and nothing was to remain 'outside' that boundaries were erected to evict and disavow the irrational and incomprehensible, and it is precisely to those unacknowledged areas that the gothic form speaks. It is for this reason that the gothic novel is a murky form, which blurs boundaries and asks uncomfortable questions. Kilgour agrees and argues that the gothic can be seen as 'a rebellion of the imagination against the tyranny of reason' (1995: 3). In addition, she argues that there is a very close link between the concerns of the Romantic movement and the rise of gothic and suggests a 'link between the gothic villain and the Romantic artist as revolutionary, the outsider and outcast, who rejects all conventions, social and literary, and seeks freedom from determining tradition that are seen as inhibiting individualism' (41). Thus the gothic novel is simultaneously understood as raising the unspeakable and the disavowed³, and as articulating some form of individual rebellion.

Furthermore, the gothic, it is argued, raises submerged anxieties and injustices while at the same time foregrounding culturally marginalized experiences such as the passion and the emotions. For this reason the gothic is considered by a number of theorists to resonate with the experiences of femininity (Botting, 1996; Kilgour, 1995; Miles, 1994; Punter, 1980; Williams A, 1994). In fact, 'the female gothic' was a term coined precisely to acknowledge a group of texts which offer 'the promise that the Gothic could say anything particular about women's experience - an experience otherwise effaced from the cultural record' (Miles, 1994: 192). The politics and benefits of this category have been hotly debated, (cf. Kilgour, 1995; Miles, 1994) and centre on whether the gothic novels' depiction of the familiar, domestic and private as a 'house of horrors' (Kilgour, 1995: 38) is a critique of patriarchy and bourgeois relations or whether the inevitable return to normality 'is ratified by its difference from the nightmare

counterpart' (Kilgour, 1995: 38). However, Kilgour suggests that the gothic's very convoluted nature 'complicates neat black and white polarities of gender or politics' (39).

Furthermore, the official discourse of the Enlightenment both designated the area of the emotions and feeling as feminine as well as suppressing this area. As Punter points out, women were considered to embody emotion at a time when women were also expected to suppress their feelings and passions. Punter suggests that the novels of Radcliffe and many other female writers of the time depict a 'woman's world' dependent on an obscure male world from which they are excluded but which affects them nonetheless and he writes that there is a strong connection 'between the Gothic novel in general and the evolution of perceptions about the subjugation of women' (95). Thus, as a form, the gothic novel is said to have spoken to those areas of experience which were made obscure in the pursuit of 'reason' and also to the (overlapping) contradictions in the feminine experience.

Many feminists have argued that the private and emotional sphere continues to be designated as feminine in the dominating 'humanist-realist' aesthetic tradition which devalues and mocks cultural output that engages in forms of 'excess' (Botting, 1996; Gledhill, 1987). Yet, the appeal for women of forms that deploy 'excess' (notably, melodrama) have been thoroughly examined by feminists particularly since the 1980s (Ang, 1985; Brown, 1990; Geraghty, 1991; Gledhill, 1987b; Hobson, 1982; Modleski, 1982). For instance, Gledhill argues that melodrama deals with 'precisely the issues realism is designed to repress', which is why there is a 'syphoning of unrepresentable material into the excessive mise en scene' (1987b: 9). Melodrama, from this description, seems to have a good deal in common with the gothic. Indeed in a landmark account of melodrama, Brooks points out that melodrama and the gothic 'nourish one another' (1976: 17), for like the gothic, melodrama points to 'what cannot be said' (11). Brooks argues that melodrama shares many characteristics with the Gothic novel; the preoccupation with 'nightmare states, with clausturation and thwarted escape, with innocence buried alive and unable to voice its claim to recognition' (20). In addition, both are a product of a society dominated by the discourse of individualism, and so are about viewing the social in personal terms. Moral categories such as 'good' and 'evil' are assigned to persons, they can be named in the innocent heroine and the 'swarthy, cape enveloped' villain. (Brooks, 1976: 17). Brooks argues that in eighteenth century society the discourse of individualism was replacing the traditional Sacred nomination of

the moral universe. Melodrama and the gothic, as a response to this, represent the urge towards spirituality and ethics but an inability to realise these in anything other than personal terms. 'Myth making could now only be individual, personal; and the promulgation of ethical imperatives had to depend on an individual act of self-understanding that would then [...] be offered as the foundation of a general ethics' (Brooks, 1976: 16). Brooks argues that for this reason, melodrama is a 'peculiarly modern form' (14).

The personalising and individualising of the spiritual and moral imagination stamps an imprint on the gothic form, which persists in contemporary horror fiction and the new vampire fiction. The contemporary vampire tale shares the themes of personalising and individualising moral dilemmas; only now the vampire is both innocent (because it has vampirism unwillingly thrust upon it) and a victim of circumstances outside of its control. The 'new' vampire can be seen to personify dilemmas of the self as well as sharing important features with the gothic heroine. In the case of the *Vampire Chronicles* (the most popular of all the new vampire texts) we find that the vampires Louis and Lestat, were unwilling victims in their vampiric transformation (even though it was Lestat who changed Louis). Louis, in particular, expresses the dilemma of his unwanted ontological status by refusing to perform the act (of drinking human blood) that he needs to sustain his existence. He desires to understand his place in the world and to have some significance in the scheme of things. Lestat is also troubled by the experience of his ambiguous status (innocent, but not 'good') and this produces anxieties and desires that propel him into ever more outrageous personal adventure (in an effort to achieve significance), while Louis sinks into a state of endless melancholy (because there are no answers to his ontological questions). Yet unlike the gothic heroines of the Radcliffian school, both Lestat and Louis have tremendous preternatural strength and intelligence to intervene in their circumstances, to overcome obstacles and to finally to achieve some sense of 'self' in a world to which they do not belong.

There is a large female readership for this vampire fiction and a considerable female fandom (cf. Melton, 1994; Skal, 1996), and while this study cannot generalize about the entire female audience for the tales of Anne Rice, I would like to propose that the vampires' quest for individual significance, their troubling, ambivalent experience of self and the pathos of their predicament, speak to the women vampire fans in this study because they resonate with their own experiences of self.

That female audiences may choose to engage with vampire fiction and choose favourites within it, suggests that not all of the possible meanings of the vampire (i.e. *Dracula*) are ones that appeal, and those that do, engage their readers in culturally specific rather than general ways. It also suggests that particular types of textual meanings are important to particular audiences and that the relationship between the two ought to be examined, rather than considering that vampire fiction addresses pre-established and fixed needs. However, the few academic accounts that address the ‘new’ vampire and its audience, echo pronouncements about manipulation and compulsive identification which abound in discussions of popular culture. The following section will discuss these approaches to notions of identification and the vampire.

The gothic, the vampire and the text: accounts of identification

Concerns about the damaging effects of gothic tales are not new. As Kilgour argues, ‘[f]rom its origins, the gothic has been defined in terms of its peculiar palpable effect upon its audience’ (Kilgour, 1995: 6). Indeed the gothic had a central place in late Eighteenth-century debates about the dubious morality involved in reading. The extension of literacy and the proliferation of the press involved ideas both about the rights of the individual to read, but also about the reader’s inability to ‘handle this responsibility, and a wariness of the potentially pernicious influence of literature on a broad but naive market’ (Kilgour, 1995: 6). According to Kilgour, ‘the gothic was seen as encouraging a particularly intimate and insidious relationship between text and reader, by making the reader identify with what he or she read’ (6). Early critics thought gothic novels encouraged an ‘amoral imagination that was a socially subversive force’ (7). In particular there were concerns that the imaginative fairy-tale world created by the gothic offered a ‘tempting alternative to the mundaneness of everyday life’ (7). However, as Kilgour points out, while early conservative moralists found the ‘gothic’s offer of an imaginative retreat from reality,’ a potentially dangerous amoral threat, ‘to many modern critics this, contradictorily, has proved it to be a reactionary, socially conservative form’ (8). This is certainly the case of those theorists who discuss the modes of identification produced in the new (gothic) vampire fiction.

Gelder, for example, while offering an important explanation of the changes in the vampire genre (discussed above), maintains a problematic model of manipulated audience identification when he shifts his discussion to the potential audience. In relation to the *Vampire Chronicles*, he argues that ‘Rice attempts to collapse [...] the “critical

distance” [...] between audience and performance, reader and text, outside and inside’ (112). This is achieved by organising the first Chronicle around the vampire Louis’ quest to discover the meaning that vampires have in the world (are they evil in contrast to the goodness of god?) and his subsequent disillusionment. At the Theatre des Vampires, where a troupe of real vampires act as vampires on stage, Louis discovers, according to Gelder, that there is ‘no reality or meaning behind vampirism’(112), that vampirism has always been an illusion; ‘to be a vampire is, in other words, to *act* like a vampire’ (112). Gelder argues that this produces a ‘new kind of faith’ which is aligned with popular fiction rather than religion, and like Louis, who, despite his disapproval, finds himself enraptured by the performance in the theatre, the reader ‘gets carried away’ by the tale and wants to become a vampire by the end of the novel. Gelder suggests that ‘one’s faith, having lapsed in the modern world, is recuperated through a closing conversion (in)to the fiction itself. It is hard to imagine a more effective way of accounting for fandom, [than] in this closing image of the converted reader/listener’ (Gelder, 1994: 112).

Gelder’s characterisation of vampire fandom through religious metaphors - ‘conversion’, ‘an act of faith’- demonstrates the extent to which he accepts the ability of texts to manipulate unwary readers and that identification with a character is compulsive - something which is a result of being ‘carried away’. This form of theorising reproduces the notion that such texts produce ‘insidious’ intimacy which compels identification. Yet the suggestions about these compulsive subject positions remain theoretical speculation. The concept of compulsive identification is common in film theory and the vampire critics who discuss vampire fandom share the idea that identification is a process outside of the control of the spectator, which flows from the text to the malleable audience, usually with detrimental effects.

A further example of this approach can be found in Hodges and Doane’s discussion of Rice’s *Vampire Chronicles*. Hodges and Doane argue that Rice constructs vampire narratives which prematurely pose the end of stable gender categories. For these theorists celebrating the end of gender too soon has had a conservative influence on the narratives of mass culture and they argue that Anne Rice typifies this ‘post-feminist’ posturing. In Rice’s androgynous world of polymorphous sexuality ‘imbalances of power are effaced’ (Hodges and Doane, 1991: 168) only to reassert the monstrosity of the non-maternal mother through the figure of Akasha, the original vampire ‘mother’ who returns to the world in the third *Vampire Chronicle* (1988) with plans to kill all of her sons. According

to Hodges and Doane, the polymorphous sexuality of the male vampires is undercut by regressive notions of the rectitude of nurturing femininity and Akasha (who tries to rule in the symbolic rather than the pre-symbolic) is punished by death for her transgression. Readers thus ‘greedily ingest’ (Hodges and Doane, 1991: 158) these conservative fantasies, taking pleasure in the early disavowal of ‘disturbing differences’ (168) which none the less continue to assert the values associated with that difference. Once again, we find that the analysis of textual meaning produced in the context of a tradition of academic concerns, being offered as an explanation of audience pleasures; the conclusions propose the standard view that these pleasures are dubious, without attempting to engage with actual audiences.

There have been a few cultural critics who have challenged this view of identification. (Barker, 1989; Stacey, 1994; Tudor, 1974). Stacey, for example, argues that cinematic identification has traditionally been problematically conceptualised as ‘a singular and rigid process which fixed the spectator as the subject of the filmic discourse’ (1994: 133). In terms of her own research with female fans of Hollywood stars, Stacey comments, ‘[i]n classifying material I received from female spectators, it was hard to pinpoint a single process and name it “identification”’ (135). Instead, Stacey argues that it is important to examine the ‘multiplicity of processes connecting female spectators to female stars’ (137). Stacey argues that there are a number of factors to consider, such as the context of gender, the role of memory, the range of identifications and the relationship between imitation of stars and projection of self.

Tudor, in an earlier account, offers a sociological explanation of the relationship between stars and spectators. He argues that it is important to make distinctions between audience-star relations which take place in the cinema itself, and those which take place outside. He also draws a distinction between ‘emotional affinity’ and ‘standard involvement’ (1974, 80) and between ‘projection’, ‘imitation’, and ‘self identification’. While Stacey and Tudor consider that the concept of identification needs extending, Barker rejects ‘identification’ as a useful category. He argues that there are a variety of terms that are capable of accounting for the notion of ‘getting carried away’ by the text; “absorption”, “concentrated attention”, “suspension of disbelief”, “intense involvement”, “deep interest” (96). However, as Barker points out, none of these terms carries with them ‘the sorts of implications that “identification” has - vulnerability to messages, loss of our own identity, submergence in the identity of media character, with a residue of influence’ (96). Barker argues that the notion of identification comes from a

‘model in which rational judgement, self-awareness and critical thinking are seen as a “veneer” over bubbling primal instincts’ (109). Thus, because the term ‘identification’ carries the baggage of its psychoanalytic origin, this thesis will deploy the term ‘engagement’ when considering the numerous processes that make up female vampire fans’ ‘readings’ of the vampire. This is to move away from the idea that fans of the vampire are suffering a compulsion, and towards the idea that they are making cultural choices which are framed by social experiences rather than psychic drives. However, Chapter Six, in examining the relationship between the vampire and the fans’ sense of self, will draw on many of the insights from the more complex models of identification put forward by Stacey and Tudor in order to analyse the fans’ accounts.

Conclusion

It is the intention of this research to reinsert the female viewer into critical discussion of vampire fiction, doing so in a way which strives not to position her as a dupe of mass culture, a victim of compulsive identification or a victim of her own masochistic desires. This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that this has not been accomplished from a textual perspective. Indeed, textual interpretations on their own have tended to echo the concerns of their own disciplines in ways which often absent or marginalize the female viewer. This is not to argue that all theoretical and textual accounts are of no use; on the contrary, it is being suggested that theories of meaning ought to be forced into contact with the ways that different groups of readers interpret texts, in order to establish which theories or combinations of theories can most usefully make sense of these accounts.

Before turning to the interpretations of vampire fiction offered by women fans in this study, it must be stated that this research began with questions about female spectatorship and the vampire. Examining women fans’ reading of texts was of primary concern in order to challenge the absence of women from theoretical accounts. However, as this project has developed, the many other practices that the women fans engage in have added to the concerns of this thesis. The women who participated in this research engaged with the vampire in a manner that went well beyond spectating or reading, to include a range of activities that cut across media forms, producing and consuming images of the vampire and fashioning the self in particular ways as a result. Thus, what began as a project to expand the interpretations of the vampire to include women, finished as a study of fandom. In the meantime, there has been a proliferation of studies of fandom which have also added to the concerns of this thesis because their

conceptualisation of fandom is problematic and, in important ways, at odds with processes at work in the fandom that I studied. The following chapter will offer a critique of the now standard model of fandom, to suggest that an alternative model needs to be developed through a consistent use of Bourdieu's analysis of the cultural field.

CHAPTER TWO: THEORISING FANDOM

Introduction

In the last ten years the study of fandom has grown considerably in cultural studies, particularly in the American academy (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Barker and Brooks, 1998; Baym, 1998; Cartmell, Hunter, Kaye and Whelehan, 1997; Classen, 1998; Dell, 1998; Fiske, 1992; Harris and Alexander, 1998; Jenkins, 1992; Lewis, 1992; Merrick, 1997; Penley, 1991; Sanders, 1997; Tulloch and Jenkins, 1995). These recent theorists of fandom have attempted to overturn the characterisation of fandom as ‘excessive, bordering on deranged’ (Jensen, 1992: 9). Instead, many theorists of fandom have sought to value the participants of fan culture and their practices in contrast to the ‘pathologization’ (Jensen, 1992) of fandom in academic circles and the media generally. Theorists have attempted to dismantle the class biased values at work in the defaming of fandom, instead conceiving it as consisting of the subordinate and the marginalized (Jenkins, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Penley, 1991; Harris and Alexander, 1998) whose engagement with popular culture has been stigmatised in order to ‘privilege the attributes of the wealthy, educated and powerful’ (Jensen, 1992: 25).

Without question, vampire fandom has been pathologized by journalists and academics alike. Just before *Interview With The Vampire* was released in Britain in January 1995, there was a flurry of interest in ‘real’ vampires in the British press which accompanied the mixed reviews of the film. The *Scottish Sunday Mail* on January 15th describes members of the Scottish Vampire Society in gently mocking tones, implying excessiveness in their behaviour in an article entitled ‘Simply Batty’. The piece is accompanied by large colour photographs of the vampire gang ‘dressed to kill’ with the sideline reading in large bold letters, ‘Ghouls keep a coffin in the living room!’ To underline the oddness of the fans, and their difference to ‘us’ the readers, the article finishes, ‘As I left, I was invited to join...’ ‘No fangs’, I replied. And fled like a bat out of hell.’ On the same day an article in the *Independent on Sunday*, entitled ‘Interview with a few vampires’, describes members of the Vampyre Society as ‘a huddle of white faced figures’, one woman having ‘astonishing hair’, a young man having ‘black hair, black lipstick, a face paler than the moon’. This voyeuristic approach to fandom (despite the playful tone) is, as Jensen puts it, ‘haunted by images of deviance’ (9). Jensen argues

that fans are 'insistently characterized as "them" [in order to] be distinguished from "people like us" (students, professors and social critics)' (1992: 9).

These media images of vampire fandom may be considered mild.⁴ There are, however, far more unpleasant descriptions of vampire fans - particularly female fans - coming from academics who study vampire fiction and consider themselves to be 'aficionados'. Skal's description of Anne Rice fans demonstrates the full thrust of such accounts:

Vampires, of course, have the uncanny ability to [...] defang all kinds of scary sexual issues. Take, for instance, the striking preponderance of obese women drawn to horror literature, gothic music, and Anne Rice in particular. Don't take my word for it: check out the marathon-length lines for Rice's next autograph signing (or any other 'gothic' event) and come to your own conclusions about the displaced oral aggression, the relationship between vampirism and eating disorders, and the curious gratification presumably straight women (commonly, if uncharitably known as 'fag hags') derive from fantastically neutered depictions of male-male sex. The plunging necklines and corpse-white makeup these women typically affect for their moment of communion with Anne Rice says it all; 'I want to be sexual, but my sexuality is dead' (1996: 175).

Skal's own interest in the vampire figure is as intense as those waiting for their 'moment of communion with Anne Rice', for he has written extensively on the subject (see bibliography). Skal, it seems, needs to draw distinctions between 'them' (fan, female, obsessed, obese, emotional, deviant) and 'us' (aficionado, male, scholarly, reasoning, rational). He stigmatises female fans in a variety of unpleasant ways and as Jensen suggests, stigmatisation is 'a form of displacement [...] that allows explanation in ambivalent or contradictory circumstances' (24). Skal's contradictory circumstance is this: he shares an interest with female fans that is culturally disparaged. Thus he has utilised the strategy of cultural distinction in order to distance his interests as 'aficionado' from theirs as 'fans'. But as Jensen argues, 'aficionado-hood is really disguised, and thereby legitimated, fandom' (23). Furthermore, Jensen reminds us that distinctions between 'them' and 'us' always 'involves a cultural hierarchy' (20). Skal draws on this cultural hierarchy when he associates fandom with neurotic femininity; and when he diagnoses this neurosis on the basis of physical appearance (the marathon length lines of obese women) he reveals nothing about fandom, but a great deal about his own acceptance of the ingrained sexism which defines, faults and diagnoses femininity and female sexuality on the basis of physical appearance. It is perhaps not surprising that

recent theorists of fandom, drawing on theoretical traditions which seek to unpack the cultural processes of power and subordination, and of valuing the practices of the 'subordinate', offer a pointed defence of fans in the face of this 'extraordinarily insulting [...] pejorative association of fandom with pathology' (Jensen, 1992: 23).

This chapter will examine the various alternative conceptualisations of fandom that recent fan theorists have offered. In considering the worth of fan practices, theorists have taken seriously the activities that fans engage in and have examined them closely (often participating themselves) offering valuable insights into this widespread cultural practice, including for example, more useful ideas about why straight women may be interested in depictions of gay male sex than those suggested by Skal (cf. Bacon-Smith, 1992; Penley, 1991). While this has been an important break from the ridicule and pathologization previously heaped on fans, this chapter will suggest that the recent approaches to fandom share problematic attitudes in four central areas: the conceptualisation of fandom in general as a mode of resistance or an act of subversion, the general lack of interest in the texts which provide the base for fandom, the question of hierarchies in fandom which is missing or marginalized from most accounts, and the approach to the concept of the mainstream. This chapter will take each of these problematic areas in turn and will then propose an alternative model of vampire fandom based on Bourdieu's account of the field of cultural production. This research turns to Bourdieu to discuss fandom because of the prevalent use of Bourdieu, in particular his analysis of 'taste' and the concept of 'cultural capital', in fan theory. But it will be argued that the use of concepts in the absence of Bourdieu's more general theorisation about the field of cultural production has led to a relativism in fan theory. It will be argued that vampire fandom (like other fandoms) should be analysed in relation to their placement in the larger field of cultural production.

Part One: Fandom as a Mode of Resistance

Reading as resistance

The majority of recent accounts of fandom theorise it as a mode of resistance. Academics have drawn on de Certeau (Classen, 1998; Jenkins, 1992; Merrick, 1997) or Bourdieu (Baym, 1998; Dell, 1998, Fiske, 1992; Watson, 1997) and often a mixture of both (Dell, 1998; Fiske, 1992; Harris, 1998; Jenkins, 1992) to theorise the subversive character of fandom.

One of the most influential accounts of fandom based on de Certeau comes from Henry Jenkins. He utilises de Certeau's conception of the 'scriptural economy' in which dominant classes 'sanction interpreters' to 'restrain the "multiple voices" of popular orality' (Jenkins, 1992: 25). From this perspective the circulation of meaning is restricted through the imposition of a reading model where the 'reader is supposed to serve as a more-or-less passive recipient of authorial meaning' (25). Furthermore, Jenkins argues that respect for authorial integrity of the message has 'the effect of silencing or marginalizing oppositional voices' (25). For Jenkins, then, authorial meaning is a major agent of social control.

Jenkins further draws on de Certeau's analogy of the social formation as conflict between an occupying army and guerrilla fighters (1984) in his analysis of the resistant nature of media fandom. Fans are likened to guerrilla fighters, making tactical raids on the structures of the powerful by poaching from their texts. Jenkins argues that fans are 'nomads' and 'poachers' of popular texts, re-working them and re-writing them to suit their own needs. He quotes de Certeau, 'readers are travellers; they move across lands belonging to someone else, like nomads poaching their way across fields they did not write, despoiling the wealth of Egypt to it enjoy it themselves' (de Certeau, in Jenkins 1992: 24). Through his use of de Certeau, then, Jenkins theorises fandom as a mode of resistance to authorial control and therefore to dominant power. Jenkins' focus (like that of de Certeau) is not on the structures of cultural power as they may impact on fandom, but 'the various tactics of popular resistance' (26). It will be argued below that such an approach underestimates the extent to which cultural hierarchies have an impact on fandom.

Jenkins also uses Bourdieu to theorise fandom as a mode of resistance by contrasting fannish interpretations of texts with bourgeois aesthetics. In the following extract, Jenkins combines Bourdieu's terminology with de Certeau's approach to subordinate reading practices to make manifesto-like proclamations about fans:

From the perspective of dominant taste, fans appear to be frighteningly out of control, undisciplined and unrepentant, rogue readers. Rejecting the aesthetic distance Bourdieu suggests is a corner stone of bourgeois aesthetics, fans enthusiastically embrace favoured texts and attempt to integrate media representations into their own social experience. Unimpressed by institutional authority and expertise, the fans assert their own right to form interpretations, to offer evaluations, and to construct cultural canons. Undaunted by traditional conceptions of literary and intellectual property, fans raid mass culture, claiming its materials

for their own use, reworking them as a basis for their own cultural creations and social interactions (18).

This perspective seems to misread Bourdieu's analysis of taste distinctions. According to Bourdieu, those at the dominant end of the field of cultural production expect popular taste to reject aesthetic distance, to be enthusiastic and to be undisciplined. Rather than frightening bourgeois taste, it reinforces the very taste distinction upon which the autonomous (elitist) disposition bases its claims to legitimacy and greater cultural dominance. Thus, embracing media texts and integrating them into one's social experience is not a 'direct and vocal affront to the legitimacy of traditional hierarchies' (18), according to Bourdieu's scheme of taste distinctions, for Bourdieu comments that 'it is not easy to describe the "pure" gaze without also describing the naïve gaze which it defines itself against.' (1993: 237)

Furthermore, Jenkins is inconsistent in his description of fan reading strategies. At times he characterises it (as was shown above) as undisciplined and based on emotional proximity. At other times he likens fan reading practices to those of a scholar, 'close attention, careful rereading, intense discussion, even the decipherment of texts in foreign or archaic languages' (53). Jenkins' argument that fans combine emotional proximity and critical distance is not in dispute. Indeed, Chapter Five of this thesis demonstrates that women vampire fans also deploy this blend of reading strategies. However, it seems a glaring omission to liken the careful reading strategies of the fans of *Star Trek* to scholars of Shakespeare (53) without considering what these shared practices might mean in terms of a shared aesthetic disposition. Chapters Six and Seven will demonstrate that there are vampire fans who are influenced by the autonomous values of the dominant pole of the field of culture.

Furthermore, Jenkins is not simply proposing fandom as a 'tactic of resistance'; he considers it to be a 'weekend utopia' (277). Jenkins argues that in the process of resistant readings, fans resist existing reality and produce an alternate reality. Thus he conceives of fandom, not as a form of escapism, but rather as an alternative reality 'whose values may be more humane and democratic than those held by mundane society' (281). He argues that fans react against 'unsatisfying situations, trying to establish a 'weekend-only world' more open to creativity and accepting of differences' (282). While it may be that popular fiction can offer imaginative possibilities (as this thesis argues in Chapter Six), it is problematic to claim, as Jenkins does, that fans are

constructing an alternative reality (283). Bourdieu argues that there is ‘no way out of culture; and one’s only chance of objectifying the true nature of the game is to objectify as fully as possible the very operations which one is obliged to use in order to achieve that objectification’ (12). He goes on to argue that, ‘[o]nly at the level of the field of positions is it possible to grasp the generic interests attached to the fact of taking part in the game and the specific interests attached to the different positions, and, through this, the form and content of the self-positionings through which these interests are expressed’ (12). Jenkins fails to consider fandom’s place within the field of culture which means that he neglects to examine the *different* positions taken in fandom and the interests they express. Instead he sees fandom as a ‘position of collective identity’ (23) and he makes grandiose claims about the ability of fans to operate outside of the cultural hierarchy. It will be argued in Chapter Nine that vampire fans are influenced by the values in dominant culture, (although they are not fixed into position by them). Taking account of the negative effect of legitimate culture on popular taste and the norms in operation in the cultural hierarchy does not mean validating those norms. However, as Bourdieu argues, ‘[i]t does mean taking note of the fact that all agents, whether they like it or not, whether they have the means of conforming to them, find themselves objectively measured by those norms’ (29). I would like to suggest that these processes operate in the subfield of fandom as much as in the rest of the cultural field which influences that subfield. Fandom from such a perspective is not a utopian space outside of culture. It is subject to the logic and dynamics of the field as a whole. It may offer fans a way of ‘imagining what utopia feels like’ (Jenkins, 1992: 283) but it does not transport them there at the weekend.

This approach to fandom, inspired by de Certeau, has been influential. For example, Classen draws on de Certeau in his analysis of Retail Coupon and Product Refund Fans (1998). He argues that ‘[a]s de Certeau theorizes, and couponing fans demonstrate, an important yet often invisible creativity exists as “spaces” are made within and out of the “places” of the dominant’ (Classen, 1998: 84). He argues that ‘couponers’ do not generally engage in this activity out of economic necessity, but instead are ‘using the products and processes of a dominant economic order intended to discipline and control consumer behaviour, [to] exhibit an everyday creativity, or “art”, that is frequently contrary to institutionalized market place norms’ (79). Similarly, Gillilan argues that female fans of *War of the Worlds* are engaged in a ‘process of rereading and rewriting

both persona and character from a position somewhat outside of the constraints of industrialised culture' (1998:195).

Other theorists who do not make such radical claims for fandom do continue to conceive of it as a mode of resistance. For example, Harris offers an analysis of Viewers for Quality Television in the US (1998), which suggests that while these fans are not involved in 'some kind of populist overthrow of the television industry' (1998: 51), their immersion in fan practices constitutes a form of 'empowerment' which she defines as the ability to 'resist and challenge' hegemonic forces (51). While Harris suggest that it is wrong to homogenise fandom, she argues that regardless of the object of fandom, or, in the case of VQT, whether the objective of fandom was achieved, fans' empowerment is directly proportional to their degree of involvement and immersion in the fandom. Thus it is the practices of fandom - whatever they may be - that are empowering and constitutive of resistance. Harris argues that the 'most important outcome for fans is that the more involved one is in fan practices, the more one comes to feel one has personal influence or control over the object of fandom (and the industry in general)' (51). Furthermore she states that it is 'the activity of fandom itself [that] appears to lead to a stronger sense of influence and control, perhaps "empowering" viewers in the face of a monolithic industry' (51).

These accounts of fandom, despite their attention to the detail of the fandom they study, homogenise fans as resisters and in the process flatten the field of fandom. Fandom is conceived of by its very nature as an act of resistance to dominant forces. The object of fandom is irrelevant, since what is of importance are the practices of fandom (whatever they may be), and how fans read the texts of popular culture 'actively' and 'against the grain'. All authorial meaning, then, is considered problematic and regressive in its attempt to impose meaning, and conversely all active readers are considered resistant and progressive in their disruption of authorial meaning.

There is, however, a small but growing body of work on fandom which problematises this over-celebration of fandom as always-and-by-its-very-nature a form of resistance. Barker, for example, has recently discussed interview material from a *Judge Dredd* fan who labelled himself as a 'fascist'. Barker argues that the cultural studies approaches to audiences and texts are inadequate to make sense of this. Either the text is seen as the 'enemy', as providing the grounds for this fan's fascism, in which case 'we must conclude that there is a fascistic potential in its storylines, and thus we move towards the position of the moral panickers' (1997: 21) or 'we may recuperate him [...] a

discontented response which merely uses Dredd as a token of his resistance' (21). This fascist fan then either 'receives the text's preferred message', or is an active generator of meaning which is predominantly theorised as an act of resistance. Barker's target in this case is the former position, but the implied problem with the latter position is clear. This fan does read actively, he wrests or indeed 'poaches' meaning from those which are conferred by the authors of the comic, which is intended as satire. Yet this active wresting of meaning, with its fascist interpretation, can hardly be considered 'progressive'. Active interpretation of texts then, is not automatically a mode of resistance.

Theorists such as Jenkins do not explicitly deny the less progressive elements in fandom, but instead skirt over it. For while he admits that 'the solutions fans propose are not ideologically consistent and coherent' (Jenkins, 1992: 283), he refuses to consider the implication of such a statement.⁵ Instead he concludes that fans have 'found the very forces that reinforce patriarchal authority to contain tools by which to critique that authority' (284). He tells us that '[r]eaders are not *always* resistant; *all* resistant readings are not necessarily progressive readings' (34). Yet due to his lack of systematic consideration of the effects of domination, Jenkins does not incorporate this insight into his model of fandom. Instead, 'fandom remains a space where a commitment to more democratic values may be renewed and fostered' (282). Thus despite his cursory nod in the other direction, the thrust of Jenkins approach is to make celebratory claims about the defiant and progressive nature of fandom.

Recently, a few fan theorists have conducted research which pose a challenge to Jenkins characterisation of fandom. For example, Jenkins' claim that all fans 'operate from a position of cultural marginality and social weakness' (26) and the assertions about fandom-as-resistance based on this oversimplification has been contested. For example, Brower's analysis of Viewers for Quality Television (VQT) (contrary to Harris) proposes that this organisation is made up of 'mature, middle-class, well-educated women and men' (1992: 163) who eschew the title of fan despite the proximity of their behaviour to fan behaviour in order to avoid the stigma of fandom. Rather than subordinate groups making tactical raids, Brower argues that '[t]hese devotees of prime time network television have [...] fashioned themselves as a rational, well-organized group engaging in aesthetic criticism (defining and discriminating "quality television") and social activism (advocating the continuance of "quality television")' (164). Rather than setting up 'alternative' 'democratic' spaces, this group have, according to Brower, produced a

‘philosophy of broadcasting [...] that [...] increasingly replicates the networks it attempts to challenge’ (176). Furthermore she argues that ‘this “democratic” organization seeks to create a position of privilege - *clout* - in relation to the networks, based on its status as an elite minority, an association of tastemakers’ (176). This analysis puts a rather different emphasis on the ‘empowerment’ that VQT members may gain from their participation.

In addition, Jenkins’ insistence that all fans lack direct access to the ‘means of cultural production’ (26) is disputed by Andrea MacDonald who has participated in and studied *Quantum Leap* fans using computer-mediated communication (CMC). MacDonald argues that ‘[s]cience fiction fandom is predominantly a white, middle-class phenomena. Given the expense of computers and computing time, the group of fans I am talking about narrows considerably’ (1998:150). She argues that CMC users are an ‘elite group’, ‘[t]hey are either academics or work for companies with connections to the Internet [...] or have the necessary finances to purchase computing equipment and pay for on-line time charges’ (150). Thus, according to MacDonald, rather than CMC opening up a democratic space for the equality of expression, ‘computing norms emerge, old social practices merge with new creating a different but not radically new discursive space’ (133).

These alternative accounts of fandom challenge the claim that fandom is (always) a subordinate social formation and that its active readings and other practices are (always) a form of popular resistance. The weaknesses in fan theory, however, are not exclusive to those who draw on the works of de Certeau. As was shown in relation to Jenkins, Bourdieu’s concepts have been just as popular in theorising fandom. Indeed there is considerable overlap in the analyses despite the differing social models outlined by de Certeau and Bourdieu, which at least one commentator, Jim McGuigan, considers are ‘not entirely compatible’ (1992). A number of fan theorists employ a mixture of de Certeau and Bourdieu (Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Dell, 1998) to explain fandom as resistance. It will be argued that such a combination puts forward a truncated version of Bourdieu which enables theorists to collapse evidence of a cultural hierarchy into proclamations of ‘resistance’

Dell for instance combines Bourdieu’s analysis of taste with de Certeau’s conceptualisation of the strategy and tactics of the subordinate (as well as Bakhtin’s theory of carnival) to discuss the subversive pleasures of female wrestling fans of the 1940’s and 1950’s in America. He draws on Bourdieu’s analysis of ‘taste’ differences as

markers of, and justifications for, social hierarchies, to analyse articles about female wrestling fans in *The New York Times*, *The T.V. Guide* and *Cosmopolitan* from the early to mid 1950's. Dell demonstrates, via Bourdieu, the way the journalists employ taste distinctions in order to denigrate and ridicule female wrestling fans. Dell then jumps from this analysis to a series of speculations about the motivations of the female fans to conclude that 'the "transgressive" behaviour of wrestling's attendant female fan is considered as a tactic to temporarily evade patriarchy and redefine the notion of "appropriate" female behaviour' (1998: 88). This conclusion, however, stems from de Certeau rather than Bourdieu. He uses Bourdieu to analyse 'dominant taste' and its processes of distinction and then slips to de Certeau to offer conjecture about the transgressive tactics of the subordinate. But the journalistic accounts can tell us very little about the motivations of the female fans themselves or their experiences of fandom. Of the five excerpts analysed in this piece, only one quotes the 'voice' of the female fan and even this is not a direct quote but a 'common cry'. There are no female fan voices in these articles, only (loaded) descriptions and interpretations of their activities. Dell's speculations about the transgression of the female fan remain speculations.

There seem to be two underlying problems in Dell's discussion. The first is to do with his evidence. Dell provides evidence for the *pathologization* of female wrestling fans through the analysis of the articles, yet his conclusions about their subversion remain beyond any evidence he presents. Like Jenkins, Dell's use of Bourdieu is misleading. He theorises the pathologization of the fans evident in the articles by arguing (in line with Bourdieu) that the dominant classes maintain their dominance partly by disguising social hierarchies through naturalising the differences in 'taste' between the subordinate and dominant. But rather than concluding in line with the logic of Bourdieu's theory that once again dominant tastes have been legitimated by (relatively) powerful groups (male journalists), contrasting their own dispositions with the 'ridiculous', illegitimate, lower class, female tastes, Dell sidesteps what is central to Bourdieu's analysis of 'taste'. For Bourdieu, agents who take elitist positions in the cultural field justify their position on the basis of contrasting their taste with working class (or subordinate) taste. So rather than reading the pathologization of these fans as evidence of journalistic nervousness about their 'transgressive' behaviour, one could instead see a dominant group naturalising their own 'good' taste and understanding of 'proper' modes of behaviour and thus legitimating it in contrast to the 'coarse' and 'unacceptable'. This is not to argue that fandoms are never subversive or indicative of changes in the social position of

subordinate groups (cf. Ehrenreich, Hess and Jacobs: 1992) but that the when sections of the media ridiculing that fandom, it is not necessarily evidence of the subversive character of the fandom.

Distinctions as resistance

Dell's approach to wrestling is directly indebted to Fiske's general approach to 'popular culture'. Indeed Fiske is one of the most influential theorists of the 'popular' and there are a number of recent theorists of fandom who draw on his work and his approach (Classen: 1998, Tankel and Murphy: 1998). For this reason, this section will discuss Fiske at some length, for his partial application of Bourdieu is common. Although Fiske's specific writings on fandom draw on Bourdieu, his general analysis of popular reading practices and his designation of popular culture as 'made by the people at the interface between the products of the culture industries and everyday life [...] made by the people, not imposed upon them' (1989: 25) is indebted to his reading of de Certeau. It will be argued that his approach to culture is not a 'Bourdeauian' one, despite his use of some of Bourdieu's concepts. Fiske may consider this acceptable for he argues that one of Bourdieu's weaknesses is 'his failure to accord the culture of the subordinate the same sophisticated analysis as that of the dominant' (1992: 32). While this may be true, I will suggest that it is problematic to overcome this by stepping outside of Bourdieu's model of cultural production to employ his concepts selectively. As Garnham and Williams argue, Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power, 'lies at the very heart of his wider general theory' (1980: 211). Fiske's use of Bourdieu is partial and misleading, resulting in a populist relativism, the logical conclusion of which is to celebrate the status quo despite claims to the contrary.

Fiske draws on Bourdieu to discuss the 'cultural economy of fandom'. He proposes, via Bourdieu, that the cultural system 'works like the economic system to distribute its resources unequally and thus distinguish between the privileged and the deprived' (1992: 31). This produces a legitimate culture or 'high' culture which is sanctioned in institutions such as education, art galleries, museums and so on. Fiske labels the sum of these sanctioned cultural values as 'official culture' (31). One can acquire official cultural capital just as one can acquire economic capital, but the acquisition of this capital is limited, excluding those who are subordinate within social formations. Fiske argues that 'official culture, like money, distinguishes between those who possess it, and

those who do not' (31) and he suggests that cultural capital 'works hand in hand with economic capital to produce social privilege and distinction' (31). Fiske's summary of the concept of cultural capital seems to follow Bourdieu very closely, but he shifts gear considerably in his actual discussion of fandom, despite his continued deployment of Bourdieu's terminology. Fiske argues that fandom is an 'appropriate culture for those in subordinated formations of the people who feel themselves unfairly excluded from the socio-economic or status enhancing rewards that official culture can offer' (45). Fiske argues that participation in fan culture produces different forms of productivity which leads to 'empowerment' (35) through the accumulation of unofficial cultural capital. Thus, Fiske likens fan culture to Bourdieu's notion of proletarian culture by arguing that like proletarian culture, 'fan culture is functional - it must be for something' (35). Fandom, according to Fiske has the function of empowering those of subordinate social formations 'whose politics lie in its opposition to the official dominant one' (34).

There are a number of problems with this account of fandom which, despite the absence of the word 'resistance', nevertheless alludes to it by the insistence that fandom is a formation against 'official culture'. The first is that the field of fandom is flattened. Indeed, from Fiske's account, fandom and its practices are really only an extreme version of the 'ordinary audience'. He argues that fandom is a 'heightened form of popular culture in industrialized societies and that the fan is an "excessive reader" who differs from the "ordinary" one in degree rather than in kind' (46). Thus fandom and fan practices become a mode of popular culture generally and lose any specificity, and popular culture is defined by Fiske primarily as a mode of resisting the dominant.

Furthermore, Fiske misuses Bourdieu's notion of the functionality of the proletarian (or subordinate) aesthetic. When Bourdieu argues that the popular aesthetic must be *for* something he is referring to the way that popular taste focuses on content whereas 'pure taste' focuses on form. In both *The Field of Cultural Production* (1993) and *Distinction: a social critique of the judgement of taste* (1984) Bourdieu discusses the specific historical development of 'pure taste': that is, how an elite section of the field of cultural production produced an aesthetic which subordinated function (content) to form. He terms this the 'autonomous' aesthetic disposition, which demands that an object be appreciated in terms of its internal characteristics and thus also demands knowledge of the specific history of the transformations in the internal form. Bourdieu argues that because of the specific history of the autonomous aesthetic, 'pure taste' refuses the values of heteronomy. Thus, rather than art being legitimated on the bases of other sets

of values such as the pursuit of economic profit, pure taste demands 'art-for-arts-sake' (1993: 51), it demands that art be autonomous. For Bourdieu, the 'refusal' of the heteronomous which autonomous art engages in must also (because of the specific history of the genesis of autonomous art) be a refusal of human passions, emotions and feelings 'which ordinary people put into their existence' (1993: 236). The autonomous disposition includes formal detachment and disinterestedness, which precludes any displays of emotional investment in the object.

Bourdieu argues that popular taste, or the 'popular aesthetic', is the opposite of this and is a response to exclusion from the cultural capital needed to participate in the autonomous aesthetic. For popular taste, function takes precedence over form because the popular audience 'refuse the "refusal" which is the starting point of the high aesthetic, i.e. the clear cut separation of ordinary dispositions from the specifically aesthetic dispositions' (1994: 237). The reluctance of ordinary working class audiences to participate in highbrow 'refusal' stems from a recognition that the logic of this system is based precisely on excluding them. 'Formal experimentation - which, in literature or the theatre, leads to *obscurity* - is, in the eyes of the working class public, one sign of what is sometimes felt to be a desire to keep the uninitiated at arms' length' (1994: 238). In a refusal of their exclusion, the working class audience have a 'deep seated demand for participation' and develop a sort of "deliberate naivety", to suspend their disbelief and "play the game" (237).⁶ The popular aesthetic, then, is one of investment in content. Bourdieu argues that this is why working class people 'expect every image to fulfil a function, if only that of a sign' (244), they are interested in what the *object* is for, 'it's a publicity photo, it's a pure document, it's a laboratory photo, it's a competition photo, it's an educational photo, etc.' (245). This sense of function is at odds with Fiske's because its focus is on working class audiences' predisposition to identify the function of cultural objects rather than referring to subcultural processes and empowerment. I am not denying that some practices in fandom are empowering for some fans (although this is not a rule of fandom and empowerment is not always resistant or progressive), but that it is unhelpful to collapse this notion into the differences in dispositions regarding form and content. I will argue in Chapter Five that women vampire fans are interested in the content of vampire texts, but that they combine the 'popular' disposition of focus on content and the deliberate suspension of disbelief with aesthetic criteria for making selections (and rejections) within the genre, demonstrating a simultaneous interest in the autonomous taste for form.

Texts in fandom

Ironically, Bourdieu's analysis of popular taste points to a key aspect of the enjoyment of cultural objects which is dismissed in much fan theory: the content of the cultural objects that are important to fans⁷. However, Bourdieu's own analysis of the cultural field does not discuss the content of cultural objects. Instead, Bourdieu concentrates on the positions agents adopt and the dispositions they display in order to offer a critique of those who would ascribe intrinsic value to objects and thus to their own (good) taste. For entirely different reasons, the content of the popular text is often dismissed by fan theorists as irrelevant (Baym, 1998; Harris, 1998, Jenkins, 1992). Fan theory is generally concerned with what fans do with texts rather than why they like them.. Considering that fandom is a social formation deeply committed to particular texts, it seems odd to ignore them. But this stems from the common approach that sees the text, the vessel of authorial meaning, as 'the enemy' and the fan as the 'hero'. Jenkins, for example, suggests that fans 'turn shit into gold' (1992: 284). He argues that 'fandom celebrates, not exceptional texts but rather exceptional readings' (284). This insistence that the 'bad' texts of popular culture are irrelevant to the fandoms based on them is problematic and Charlotte Brunsdon offers comments which are pertinent to those fan theorists who counter pose 'bad texts' with 'good readings'. She argues that despite being motivated by a desire to 'investigate', rather than 'judge other peoples pleasures' the insistence on avoiding a discussion of and judgements about texts 'seems somehow to recreate the old patterns of aesthetic domination and subordination' (1989: 126). This point could be levelled at Jenkins. His desire to rescue what is 'good' in fan activity from the 'bad' products of mass culture could be interpreted as an assumed superior aesthetic understanding (despite his own proclamations about his own fandom), for underlying the 'bad text/good audience' formula is the notion that 'we' really know that these texts are 'bad', but in order to avoid making 'them' (the fans) out to be cultural dupes, 'we' must celebrate the readings 'they' produce. This may explain the over-celebratory approach to fandom as well as the reluctance to make judgements about fan judgements. Fannish interpretations and activity are put on a pedestal and any one who approaches that pedestal with critical theory is labelled an elitist. But actually it is the treatment of all popular texts as essentially the same, - i.e., 'bad' - that is elitist. There are enormous varieties in the quality and politics (although they don't necessarily go in tandem) of popular narratives and, as Brunsdon argues, 'most academics involved in

audience studies are using qualitative criteria, however expressed or repressed and [...] the constitution of the criteria involved should be the subject of explicit debate' so that 'the issues of judgement [can] be brought out from 'under the seminar table' (126).

Unlike Jenkins, I have argued that an analysis of the content of texts to which fans and audiences attach themselves does have a role to play in understanding specific fandoms. Why some groups of fans should choose depictions of a pathos-filled vampire (rather than the cast of *Star Trek*, for instance), must be considered. As was argued in the previous chapter, there are unspoken tensions in the gothic and melodramatic 'new' vampire that provide means for articulating feminine dissatisfactions which 'have no name' and in Chapter Five it will be argued that it is precisely the unease offered in these gothic tales which draws the women who become fans and helps them to define ways that their own unease matters. Jenkins' refusal to engage in a discussion about the content of the texts which fans are so enthusiastic about, his determination to 'value the cultural experiences [of fans] apart from the specific merits of the chosen texts' (54), seems inadequate. In order to take seriously fannish interpretations of favoured texts and why certain texts 'speak' to certain fans, it is important to attend to the content of those texts.

Fiske, on the other hand, does spend considerable time discussing texts in his large body of writing on popular culture. Nevertheless, the potential appeal to audiences seems to be reducible to whether or not the texts are 'producerly'. By this he means a text that is accessible (unlike a 'writerly' avant garde text which is challenging, difficult and shocking) and has the openness of a writerly text. For Fiske, such a producerly text 'exposes however reluctantly, the vulnerabilities, limitations, and weaknesses of its preferred meanings' (1989: 104). This definition could be applied to the vast majority of 'popular' texts in circulation, thus to be of any value as a concept one would have to investigate the specific gaps and contradictions and the potentials that arise from them in specific texts and then make judgements about them (from an explicitly stated position, informed by the politics of opposition to inequality and domination). Yet, Fiske's approach to texts has been very popular in fan studies and some theorists do follow the logical trajectory of this approach, producing a populist celebration of commodity culture (Cartmell, Hunter, Kaye and Whelehan, 1997). For example, a recent volume of fan studies, *Trash Aesthetics: Popular Culture and its Audience* (Cartmell, Hunter, Kaye and Whelehan, 1997), begins with a manifesto style proclamation about fandom. It celebrates shifting attention away from 'what ideal audiences should be reading and

viewing to what real people actually enjoy' (1). It discovers the 'unexpected complexity in "trash culture"' (1) and argues that the 'most vibrant research is committed to taking audiences and their pleasures seriously' (1). Cartmell et al. have produced what James Curran (1990) characterises as 'the new revisionism' which really amounts to a reworking of traditional liberal pluralism. It is a liberal pluralist celebration of commodity culture, for instance, that informs their argument that '[a]cademics are learning what advertising agencies have always known: the power of consumer sovereignty. One of the many pleasures of consumer capitalism is that it so perfectly services this fragmented, post-modern individual. Out there in the global pick-n-mix is a text just for you; or a text you can customise to your desires.' (3) This venerates the very commodity culture whose organisation and practices play a role in the maintenance of unequal power relations.

Similarly, Classen's analysis of Product Refund Fans insists on the limitations of 'economistic analyses' and warns us not to 'dismiss the economic as abstract or uniformly oppressive'⁸, but instead articulate the ways in which the 'microeconomic and the processes of purchasing and acquiring are often intertwined with popular semiotic and social pleasures' (85).

Jim McGuigan has produced a well-known critique of this populist celebration of consumer capitalism, including a critique of Fiske. He argues that Fiske produces 'a kind of subjective idealism, focused more or less exclusively on "popular readings", which are applauded with no evident reservations at all, never countenancing the possibility that a popular reading could be anything other than "progressive"' (1992: 72). For McGuigan, although Fiske presents an 'ostensibly critical' look at the power relations in the cultural arena, in effect, 'the gap between "popular" and "mass" culture is finally closed with no residual tension' (73). We can see in those who follow on from Fiske that the gap has indeed closed. But this populism does not emanate from Bourdieu. Instead it is the truncated version, which according to McGuigan has been 'raided and sanitised' (72). The key to Bourdieu's analysis of the popular aesthetic is that just as in the economic field there are unequal distributions of power, and that the popular gaze is always defined in relation to the 'pure gaze' from a position of subordination. From his point of view, however, one gaze is not objectively more valuable than the other. Instead they are produced in relation to each other in the context of specific material and historical circumstances of domination and subordination. Bourdieu writes:

there is no *neutral*, impartial, ‘pure’ description of either of these opposing visions (which does not mean that one has to subscribe to aesthetic relativism, when it is so obvious that the ‘popular aesthetic’ is defined in relation to ‘high’ aesthetics and that reference to legitimate art and its negative judgement on ‘popular’ taste never ceases to haunt popular experience of beauty). *Refusal or privation?* It is as dangerous to attribute the coherence of a systematic aesthetic to the objectively aesthetic commitments of ordinary people as it is to adopt, albeit unconsciously, the strictly negative conception of ordinary vision which is the basis of every ‘high’ aesthetic (1994: 237) [my italics].

In this quotation Bourdieu is warning against precisely the kinds of relativist and over celebratory approaches to popular taste engaged in by Fiske, Jenkins, and other theorists of fandom.⁹ The characterisation of fandom as a mode of resistance, subversion and empowerment, then, has a tendency to slip into uncritical celebrations of consumer capitalism. Furthermore, such an approach has focused on fan practices and ignored the content of the texts to which fans are attached. This focus on fan practice and its homogenous characterisation as resistance has led to reducing the field of fandom, to a single function, which obscures, rather than reveals, the processes at work. One of the main consequences of this homogenous designation of fandom as the resistance of the subordinate, has been to ignore or side step the existence of hierarchies in fandom. The following section addresses the omission of discussions of hierarchies in theories of fandom and their implications.

Approaches to hierarchies

There are very few studies of fandom which address the question of hierarchies in fandom (MacDonald, 1998; Brower, 1992), yet there is much in various fan theorists’ ‘thick descriptions’ of fandom which could be interpreted as hierarchical formations. (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Chinball, 1997; Jenkins, 1992; Harris, 1998). This section of the chapter will examine how the existence of hierarchies within fandom has been ignored and will consider the implications of this neglect. It will propose that there are fan hierarchies in fan practices and organisations, and in the different reading strategies employed by fans.

Camille Bacon-Smith (1992) provides one of the earlier examples of ‘thick descriptions’ of women *Star Trek* fans. Bacon-Smith, however, does not just ‘describe’. She has an underlying approach which forms the way in which she interprets her data.

Like other fan theorists, Bacon-Smith conceives of the activities that her fans are involved in as ‘subversion’ and ‘transgression’. Her study concentrates on women fans who rewrite *Star Trek* narratives and she proclaims, ‘[i]nfringing copyrights, the law they break, is only the mildest part of the subversion fomented [...] [a]s their greatest transgression, many of the ladies write about sex in all its permutations’ (6). Like Jenkins, Bacon-Smith argues that the women fans are ‘inventing a culture’ which offers an ‘alternative structure for organizing experience’ outside of ‘masculine culture’ (292). She argues that ‘the structures and language that fans use arise out of a distinct cultural model, a world view separate from that of masculine culture’ (295).

However, Bacon-Smith misses out or explains away many examples of fan hierarchies evident from her descriptions. Unacknowledged hierarchies seem evident in Bacon-Smith's study in three important areas: admission to groups, the writing of fan fiction, and fan magazine production. For example, when discussing the tensions in fan groups, Bacon-Smith uses terminology which explains them away. She writes:

for those core fans who draw their social lives from the structures of fandom, there seems to be an optimal number of participants that provides members with a comfortable balance between variety in product and control over their social matrix. When participation exceeds this level, the stress builds to an extent that the group must fragment or self-destruct. For most fans the optimum number in this level of organisation is the number of participants with whom one member may have a personal acquaintance, between two hundred and fifty and five hundred participants (25).

This is loaded description dressed up as (pseudo) science. She is treating her ‘variables’ as if they have the precision of equations related to the combustion engine: (1 fan + % ‘acquaintance’ ratio x optimal social matrix control = 1 fan community); too much gassy pressure and the thing explodes. In fact, MacDonald (who will be discussed below) suggests that the level of involvement in fandom is one of the key manifestations of hierarchy. As Chapter Nine of this thesis will demonstrate, fan organisations fragment and bust up. But this cannot be explained in terms of an unreliable notion of optimal numbers of participants, but because of real struggles between fans to designate what is legitimate in fandom and who has the right to make those designations.

Similarly, when Bacon-Smith discusses the modus operandi of fan writing circles, her enthusiasm for the fandom and her tacit approval of and immersion in the ‘inner circles’ of the fandom limits her analysis of the processes at work.¹⁰ She writes:

[t]o gain entry into circle, a participant has only two options: she may join with a friend or friends to form a core, and attract others to her group, or a member of an existing group may introduce her to an existing circle. Final acceptance by the group will depend on the degree of congruence between the new member and the established participants (215).

Because Bacon-Smith has already decided that the fans are resisting the narrative experience of 'masculinist culture', she has no need to question the boundaries being drawn and the exclusions being made within the fan writing circles. The sense that there is a criterion at work about the possession of specialised knowledge (cultural capital), and that there are those who adopt positions to designate what is legitimately included, seems to be crying out yet remains unsaid in Bacon-Smith's discussion. The unacknowledged processes of cultural distinction seem particularly in operation in the following passage:

because the circuit is so well hidden, only the most experienced writers and readers have access to it. These experienced fans work consciously to *preserve the standards* [my italics] of fan fiction developed over time in *Star Trek* and other fan literature; at the same time, the very depth of their experience gives them the freedom to explore new ways of expressing the messages most important to them (215).

In other words, this fandom is populated by fans taking positions to sanction themselves as experienced fan fiction writers, who can legitimately designate who is and who isn't experienced enough to be considered, and to endorse others like themselves, thus securing their position within the fandom. This becomes even clearer in her description of the writing of fan fiction. Newcomers are labelled 'neophytes', and are told to occupy positions of newcomers. Bacon-Smith writes, 'Roberta frequently suggests that newcomers amend well-worn plots with a humorous twist. She recognizes that the beginning writer may not have mastered the codes and conventions she needs to write a story that the group, her readers, will take seriously. In humour, however, the neophyte inhabits a liminal area where she may practice the manipulation of the community's codes' (153).

Like other areas of cultural life, fans are expected to accumulate the appropriate cultural capital (or internalise the appropriate habitus) deemed to merit inclusion by those who police the boundaries of legitimacy. Bacon-Smith addresses this issue when she suggests that editors of fanzines act as 'arbiters of taste' by suggesting changes to stories that have not met the aesthetic criteria of the group. But she skirts over the issue

by proposing that the editor's role is to maintain the 'integrity' of the circuit (215).

Chapter Eight of this thesis will examine how such practises are experienced as 'border controls' by (in particular working class women) fans in both Britain and America.

Chapter Nine will examine the treatment received by 'newcomers' in American vampire fandom in terms of just such processes of 'taste' discriminations.

While Bacon-Smith simply refuses to acknowledge the existence of hierarchies in the tensions between fans, most fan theorists adopt the strategy of side stepping the issue. There are a number of studies of fandom that acknowledge tensions between fans, and yet the focus of such studies remains fixed on the theorist's own group of fans who are designated as cultural resisters. Constance Penley for example, focuses on the transgression of female *Star Trek* fans who write 'slash' stories (homoerotic fiction usually between Spock and Kirk) although she acknowledges that there are those who abhor such activities. She says very little about them other than to contrast them with her own subversive fans and thus leaves the model of fandom intact (1991). Similarly, Cicioni acknowledges 'implicit homophobia' in some fans of *Inspector Morse* and *The Professionals*. But again, she chooses to leave this to one side by focusing again on slash writers and their growing awareness of the political dimension of homosexuality 'by dealing with specific gay issues such as safe sex and "outing".' (1998: 170) She concludes that slash fiction has considerable subversive potential because it gives rise to women's desires 'outside the dominant notions of love relations' (175) and 'reflects tensions that are implicitly political' (175). The validity of this claim for this group of fans is not in dispute, but how would the current celebratory model of fandom-as-resistance, (including the notions of fandom as democratic, inclusive and accepting) stand up to an examination of those fans who display racism, sexism or homophobia? Chapter Three discusses the racism of some of the vampire fans whom I met through this project and Chapter Nine suggests that vampire fandom is riddled with hierarchies and therefore cannot be categorised as a mode of resistance per se.

MacDonald's study of *Quantum Leap* fans confirms the view that there are hierarchies in the different reading strategies employed in fandom. MacDonald is concerned with the way that fans are characterised as 'either zealots of mass culture or magically creative individuals reworking mainstream culture into new resistant forms' (1998: 135). For MacDonald, the refusal to recognise fan hierarchies by academics stems from the way fandom views itself as 'being antithetical to "mundane" social norms' (136). She writes that fans do not 'explicitly recognize hierarchies, and academics also hesitate to

recognise hierarchies in fandom' (136). Nevertheless, MacDonald insists that '[f]andom, just like the legitimate culture Bourdieu describes, is hierarchized' (136). MacDonald designates five modes of fan hierarchies: hierarchy of knowledge, hierarchy of fandom level, hierarchy of access, hierarchy of leaders, and hierarchy of venue. MacDonald then usefully problematises the claim that fandom is a mode of resistance through her description and analysis of fan hierarchies. Her descriptions of the operations of *Quantum Leap* fandom share many similarities to the vampire fans groups that will be discussed in Chapter Nine of this thesis. In particular, her suggestion that fan groups have leaders or authorities who sanction activities and interpretations is one that has resonance in vampire fandom, which I will characterise as 'policing the boundaries' of fandom.

One of the very few systematic examinations of hierarchies within popular culture comes, however, from a theorist working outside of fan theory. This is Sarah Thornton's analysis of club cultures in Britain, which this section will examine in some detail for it raises a variety of issues pertinent to theorising fandom. Thornton argues that scholars have paid little attention to the hierarchies that exist within popular culture, instead conceiving of popular culture as 'a curiously flat folk culture' (1995: 8). Thornton breaks with the influential Birmingham School's definition of 'subculture' with its emphasis on 'resistance'¹¹, to instead examine the ideologies and discourses through which youth subcultures - like clubbing - understand and value their activities. Thornton draws on Bourdieu's *Distinctions* (1984) to propose that club cultures are 'taste cultures', and are 'riddled with cultural hierarchies' (3). These hierarchies are based on drawing distinctions between themselves, as 'hip' participants of 'authentic' culture, against the 'mainstream' or the media. Thornton likens the ideologies of clubbers to those of the elite art world, thus, '[b]oth criticize the mainstream/masses for being derivative, superficial and *femme* [...] conspicuously admire innovative artists, but show disdain for those who have too high a profile as being charlatans or overrated media-sluts' (5). Thornton avoids the terminology, but what she has identified is that clubbers share the aesthetic disposition of the autonomous pole of the field of cultural production, despite the difference in the cultural objects they value. It will be argued that some fans too share this disposition in their own cultural practices.

For Thornton, then, clubbers are accumulating 'subcultural capital' which confers 'status on its owner' and produces 'distinctions' (11) and she argues that '[d]istinctions are never just assertions of equal difference; they usually entail some claim to authority

and presume the inferiority of others' (10). This in turn produces hierarchies, and in club culture the top of this hierarchy is populated by the 'alternative', 'hip', 'authentic', male, 'insider'. At the bottom of the hierarchy we find the 'mainstream', 'naff', 'commercial', female (Sharon and Tracy dancing 'round their handbags') majority (115). The insight that subculture participants (including fans) make taste distinctions between themselves and others, through the accumulation of 'symbolic capital' resulting in hierarchies within the subculture is very useful. This thesis will examine the distinctions made by vampire fans and will discuss the various hierarchies that result.

Thornton's emphasis on club culture's ideologies, 'not as innocent accounts of the way things really are, but as ideologies which fulfil the specific cultural agendas of their beholders' (10) has been a useful rebuttal to those who would identify all subcultural activity as automatically 'resistance through rituals' (Hall and Jefferson, 1976; Hebdidge, 1979). Particularly useful for this thesis is Thornton's critique of the under-theorised concept of the mainstream which will be discussed below.

Yet, despite the useful 'stick bending', I take issue with some of Thornton's conclusions and suggest that she bends the stick too far. For example, Thornton suggests that values within club culture (or dispositions) are *only* ideologies to legitimise the distinctions being made and the elitist 'agenda' of 'us' and 'them'. This is as one sided as those who claim that 'popular cultural capital' is never 'discrimination' and always 'democratic', 'participation' (Fiske, 1992: 45). Both sides of this binary are reductive and miss out on the more dialectical approach to social practice which emphasises that social phenomena can incorporate just such opposites. It will be argued that fandoms can simultaneously include both hierarchies and resistance (but that resistance cannot be understood as resulting primarily from reading against the grain of popular texts). For those theorists still interested in understanding the myriad processes of opposition within an increasingly commercialised, deregulated cultural field and the relationship between conflict in the cultural field and the field of politics and economics, it is neither adequate to cast all interactions with the products of the culture industries as acts of subversion, nor to view any subcultural attachments to values which oppose the dominant commercial imperatives in the field, as acts of elitist distinction. One approach sees resistance everywhere and thus, as was argued previously, celebrates consumer capitalism. The other refuses to recognise resistance where it actually exists. This can be seen in Thornton's disparaging remarks about those 'ravers' who took to the streets to fight the introduction to the Criminal Justice Act in the early 1990s in Britain (168). The

final section of this chapter will propose that members of the same fandom are influenced by one or other 'dominant' set of values in the field, but that the struggle between the two dominant sets of values produces the potential for new positions to arise. Thus within one fandom we can see different levels of opposition and incorporation coexisting.

Because the thrust of Thornton's discussion is a critique of the over-politicisation of subcultures by academics and a critique the 'ideologies' of club culture as forms of elitist distinction, she focuses on the 'micro-structures of power' to the extent that she seems to deny even the existence of 'cultural dominations of some ruling class' (163). However, this thesis is interested in the processes of power and subordination as they affect groups in the field of culture. It is the manner in which these terms have been discussed that is in dispute. The next section of this chapter will examine the way that fan theory has conceptualised 'the mainstream' and thus the concepts of dominance and subordination.

Approaches to 'the mainstream'

Sarah Thornton tells us that '[i]nconsistent fantasies of the mainstream are rampant in subcultural studies. They are probably the single most important reason why subsequent cultural studies find pockets of symbolic resistance wherever they look' (93). Theories of fandom and the studies of fan cultures share this problem. There is a general tendency to deploy under-theorised terms to denote the power which fans are said to resist. Sometimes this is called the 'mainstream' or 'official culture', (Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992), sometimes it is called patriarchal culture or 'masculinist culture' (Penley, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992) and other times it is termed 'mundania' (Jenkins, 1992). Despite their formal difference, the function of these terms is the same; the borrowed legitimacy of these terms is used to stand in for a thorough discussion of that which fans resist. This section will argue that the lack of examination of the various concepts used leads to two common problems; the first is a taken-for-granted assumption that the dominant end of the cultural hierarchy is monolithic. The second is, paradoxically, that fans (and other popular readers) can step outside 'culture', taking the products of commercial capitalism with them, to make them anew in that space beyond the existing cultural set up. It will be argued, following on from Bourdieu's cultural materialism, that the dominant end of the field of cultural production is not monolithic, but is made up of two contending sets of dominant aesthetics. Furthermore, there is no way to be *outside* of culture. Bourdieu's model of the field of cultural production is one

in which different ‘gazes’ exist in relation to each other; there is no gaze outside of the cultural hierarchy. This section will begin by examining the main ways that terms like ‘the mainstream’ have been used to provide an oversimplified dominant power against which all fan practices can be valued.

Jenkins slides between different terms to denote what it is that fans are resisting and thus what alternative reality they are constructing. At one point he is ‘discussing ways that subordinate classes elude or escape institutional control’ (26) and thus ‘analyzing locations where popular meanings are produced outside of official interpretative practices’ (26). Therefore what is being resisted here are ‘official interpretive practices’ which presumably then, constitute power and domination (leave aside for the moment the issue of fans constructing canons which Jenkins admits takes place, and the way this mirrors the values of one group at the dominant pole of the field of cultural production) (95). Later it is ‘patriarchal authority’ (115) which is being resisted and it is women fans who are doing the resisting of ‘masculine interpretive strategies’ (113). By Jenkins’ conclusion though, it is ‘mundane life’ which is being resisted (282). It is worth considering this slippage in terms for a moment. These three terms all signal ‘bad authority’ in Jenkins’ scheme of fandom, but it will be argued that resisting ‘mundania’ is not unproblematically progressive. However, Jenkins relies on the borrowed authority of terms like ‘patriarchy’ and ‘official culture’ to lend legitimacy to the status of the concept of the ‘mundane’. Because Jenkins refuses to incorporate into his model of fandom theories which can account for the less progressive elements of fan discrimination, he becomes ensnared in the problem of lack of clarity about what it is that fans are resisting. For what is this mundane world, the resistance to which Jenkins can only approve? At one level it is the drudgery of work-a-day life. But that is not all there is to it. When Jenkins supports the distinction fans make between ‘fan culture and the mundane world’ (262) he is applauding distinctions which have derogatory connotations regarding class and gender. For example, a ‘filk’ song describes mundane life as a ‘“Barbie and Ken” existence in suburbia, watching soap operas, discussing *Readers Digest* articles, eating Big Macs, gossiping about the neighbours, and engaging in quick sex at a single’s bar before settling down to raise their 2.3 children’ and Jenkins congratulates the author for a ‘biting satire of American consumer society’ (263). But the target is not the powerful corporations of American consumer society. Instead it is the ‘mundane’ consumers. Looked at more closely, one can identify two sets of distinctions being made that seem to be in line with some of the values at the dominant

pole of the field. First there are a set of class-biased distinctions being made. References to eating Big Macs and living in suburbia are not empty of value, but signify working class, or lower middle class, America. Gender is also marked, because the remaining descriptions draw distinctions that have derogatory inferences of femininity. Barbie and Ken are girls' toys, and soap opera 'gossiping', reading *Readers Digest* and raising children are all considered (and devalued) as female occupations and interests (cf. Huyssen, 1986). The fannish descriptions of 'mundania', such as the one quoted above, reveal a great deal about contradictions in fannish opposition to the 'mainstream' and the distinctions being drawn and should be unpacked rather than celebrated. As Bourdieu argues, taste 'unites and separates' (1984: 56) and these distinctions share important characteristics with the autonomous aesthetic disposition, namely 'distinguishing oneself from the common people' (31).

Fiske also inadequately theorises the concept of the mainstream. While he draw on Bourdieu, his approach is flawed by omitting Bourdieu's overarching analysis of the field of cultural production.¹² Like Jenkins he incorrectly characterises the dominate end of the field as monolithic and then wrongly proposes that fans can jump outside of what he terms 'official culture'. Fiske summarises Bourdieu thus:

The cultural system works like the economic system to distribute its resources unequally and thus distinguish between the privileged and the deprived. This cultural system promotes and privileges certain cultural tastes and competences...is socially and institutionally legitimated, and I shall refer to it as official culture, in distinction from popular culture which receives no social legitimation or institutional support. (1992: 31)

This sounds very convincing but it is inaccurate. While it is true that Bourdieu argues that the tastes of ordinary people are given no institutional support, and in fact are denigrated, it is misleading to suggest that Bourdieu refers to a single 'official culture' which privileges a singular set of tastes. Bourdieu argues, as will be demonstrated in the final section of this chapter, that the field of cultural production is dominated by two opposing sets of values. Thus domination cannot be monolithic due to the struggle between those who occupy the dominant end of the field to assert their greater validity. The implications of the fissures that arise out of the struggles between the dominant will be considered in relation to fandom and the positions occupied by the agents therein.

Thornton, despite her valuable critique of the way the concept of the mainstream has been used by cultural theorists, also collapses terms that are distinct. Because, as she

rightly points out, clubbers and academics alike collapse terms like ‘mainstream’ and ‘commercial’ together, Thornton, finding the former an untheorised ‘chimera’, (93) then herself, ignores the difference between these two concepts. However, the concept of the ‘mainstream’ and that of ‘commercialism’ are different and need to be separated, for the concept of ‘commercial culture’ is crucial to understanding, as Bourdieu argues, the values of the dominant group at the dominant pole of the field of cultural production. This concept is not simply a fantasy in the subcultural service of ‘us’ and ‘them’, it plays a major legitimating role for the dominant pole’s designation of cultural worth and refers to concrete practices and positions within the field. Thus Thornton misses (as does the resistance-to-mainstream position) the way that Bourdieu defines the cultural field as not made up of a monolithic ‘dominant’, but of two opposing sets of dominant positions who struggle with each other for power in the field. Those who dominate the dominant end of the field of cultural production would have it that commercial imperatives were accepted as the *raison d’être* of cultural output. This is particularly evident in increasingly commercial climate in Britain where deregulation and privatisation are the key phrases of the broadcasting policy makers (cf. Freedman, 1998). The fact that there is another (less powerful) elite who dispute these values means that ‘dominance’ is not monolithic or incontestable, and the idea that cultural production is about profit, does not reign unchallenged. It will be argued that both sets of dispositions influence fandom and which is taken up is significant. Despite the potential for ‘elitism’, to break with a commercial view of culture is to break with the dominant bourgeois definition of cultural legitimacy. In other words, it is not just subcultural rhetoric, but part of a wider cultural struggle to define culture worth. The final section of this chapter will outline Bourdieu’s theory of the field of cultural production to demonstrate that his emphasis is on the struggle between two opposing sets of values at the dominant end of the field. It will further suggest that this struggle influences the subfield of fandom.

Part Two: Bourdieu and the Field of Cultural Production

The structure of the cultural field

Bourdieu argues that the arena of cultural production can be characterised as a *field* which is relatively autonomous from but homologous with other fields, such as that of power, politics and economics. In fact, Bourdieu situates the field of cultural production within the field of power which is itself situated in the field of class relations (1993: 38).

However, he insists on the ‘relative autonomy’ with respect to these fields (37) and proposes that the field is analysed in terms of heuristic thinking which emphasises the specificity of the field’s genesis as a set of relations. Bourdieu argues:

The task is that of constructing the space of positions and the space of position-takings [*prises de position*]¹³ in which they are expressed. The science of the literary field is a form of *analysis situs* which establishes that each position is subjectively defined by the system of distinctive properties by which it can be situated relative to other positions: that every position, even the dominant one, depends for its very existence, and for the determinations it imposes on its occupants, on the other positions constituting the field; and that the structure of the field, i.e. of the space of positions, is nothing more than the structure of the distribution of the capital of specific properties which governs success in the field and the winning of external [i.e. commercial] or specific profits (such as literary prestige) which are at stake in the field (39).

Here Bourdieu is suggesting that the field of cultural production is relational as the space of available positions is dependent upon its similarity and difference to other positions and that each position is thus related to the other positions that structure the field. While it may seem as though Bourdieu is reproducing a structuralist model in which one thing is only defined against or in opposition to another, there are two important differences. The first is Bourdieu’s use of historical materialism. For Bourdieu, the space of possible positions is temporal (or historical) and is thus a result not only of their internal differences but also of the history of positions that have made up the field into the structure of which new positions necessarily enter and that these positions are linked to the uneven distribution of different forms of capital.¹⁴ This leads to the second point; that the field is not just made up of positions, but also of position-takings. By this Bourdieu means that positions only become positions when taken up and occupied by a social agent, and that the taking up of positions can alter the structure of available positions, as did Flaubert when he wrote *Madame Bovary*.

The dynamics of the field

Further, Bourdieu proposes that the dynamic resulting from the structure of positions and the takings of positions in the field of cultural production constitutes it as a field of struggles. Those who hold positions which accrue to them capital (symbolic or economic) attempt to hold their positions against those who struggle to establish the dominance of their own positions. Bourdieu writes, ‘[t]he literary or artistic field is a

field of forces, but it is also a *field of struggles* tending to transform or conserve this field of forces' (30).

Thus, for Bourdieu, the direction of movement in the field of cultural production depends on the struggles therein. This is concretely shaped by the given state of the system, which is the range of possible positions given by the history of positions and position-takings that make it up at any given moment. But also, it is the actual positions that agents take up in any given moment and the balance of forces between these social agents, 'who have entirely real interest in the different possibilities available to them as stakes and who deploy every sort of strategy to make one set or other prevail' (34). For Bourdieu, this system is not the result therefore of 'coherence seeking intention' but is the product of permanent conflict.

The two poles and the struggle for dominance

Bourdieu proposes that the fundamental struggle in the field of cultural production is between the two groupings (articulated in *positions*) at the dominant end of the field of cultural production. On the one hand there is the dominant set of positions. These are bourgeois positions whose strategies of legitimation are concerned with the 'success' of the objects concerned. 'Success' here is to do with the quality of the audience (both in size and in class composition) but more importantly how this translates into economic gain (40). This dominant position at the dominant end of the field possesses high economic capital and 'success' is thus conceived of as that which reproduces the dominance of these positions (i.e. which reproduces high economic capital and the legitimacy of this principle in cultural production). Thus the dominant positions in the field are engaged in the 'sub-field of large scale production' which reproduces economic capital (53).

Still situated within the dominant end of the field of cultural production are what Bourdieu calls the 'dominated', (30) whose principles of legitimacy are opposed to the bourgeoisie. The artistic pole bases its claim for legitimacy, not on large scale production and the reproduction of economic capital, but on small scale production and the recognition of one's peers who are those who also occupy positions high in specific cultural capital and low in economic capital. Bourdieu argues that this is a game of 'loser wins' (39) which is an inversion of the fundamental principles of the economies in other fields so that artists consider economic success a sign that one has 'sold out'.

Thus for Bourdieu, the field of cultural production is fundamentally a field of conflict between the bourgeoisie and artists; large scale production versus restricted production; principles of legitimacy in accord with the logic of economics versus principles of legitimacy autonomous from the logic of economics. Furthermore, he argues that both sets of principles are principles of 'hierarchization' (40) because both are struggles for dominance over what genres and forms are considered most valid and 'who is legitimately entitled to designate legitimate writers or artists' (41). Bourdieu writes:

[t]he struggle in the field of cultural production over the imposition of the legitimate mode of cultural production is inseparable from the struggle within the dominant class (with the opposition between 'artists' and 'bourgeois') to impose the dominant principle of domination (that is to say - ultimately - the definition of human accomplishment) (41).

This struggle therefore produces two opposing principles of hierarchization which correspond to the space of positions in each sub-field and the state of relation of those positions to the overarching fields of power and class relations. The dominant (bourgeois) end produces a *heteronomous* principle of hierarchization (40) whose struggle for cultural dominance is linked to their economic and political domination and thus the principles are in accord with the principles that dominate the economic and political fields. Their struggle for legitimacy and dominance is thus a struggle *against* the autonomy of the cultural field and *for* its integration into the value systems of economic, political and class power. It is heteronomous in the sense that it is linked to the logic and interests of other fields.

In opposition to this is the 'autonomous principle' of domination (40) which, despite its opposition to bourgeois values and interest and its demand that they are denied in the cultural field, continues to have stakes in 'the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer' (42). Bourdieu characterises this pole as the art-for-art's-sake disposition with its own drive to monopolise the power to 'consecrate producers and products' (42). Also, this set of positions is not without its own drive to accumulate capital. But, rather than the accumulation of economic capital, this group are accumulating symbolic or specific capital in terms of prestige and recognition within the autonomous sub-field. This is what Bourdieu characterises as accumulation in the long run. Unlike the bourgeoisie who engage in short production cycles 'intended to ensure a rapid return of profits through rapid circulation of products (97), such as the best selling

novel or block busting film; those at the 'cultural pole' will eschew short term popularity in favour of becoming a long term classic and accruing the symbolic capital that is conferred from this sort of recognition.

Furthermore, while the autonomous pole is in a position to liberate 'their products from all external constraints', because of the specific historical conditions under which the 'process of autonomization' took place (113),¹⁵ it nevertheless creates its own hierarchy which not only distinguishes it from the bourgeoisie, but also the 'commoners' and thus the art-for-art's-sake position creates its own form of elitism in the process of distinguishing itself from the values of the bourgeoisie (and the market pressures of the arising from this system of legitimization) and from the ordinary population.

The opposition of the 'cultural pole' to bourgeois values is thus contradictory because the space of available positions (which are determined in relation to those dominant bourgeois positions) predisposes the position-takers towards forms of legitimation saturated with concepts of 'the pure', 'the abstract' and 'the esoteric' (20) which necessitate exclusion. Bourdieu argues that a 'restricted language' (119) is produced and reproduced in accordance of these social relations which are dominated by the 'quest for distinction' (119). Bourdieu argues that this set of relations 'demand the almost reflexive knowledge of schemes of expression which are transmitted by an education explicitly aimed at inculcating the allegedly appropriate categories' (119). In other words the restricted field tends to develop its own criteria for valuation and legitimation which is based on the possession of *specific* capital, i.e. the symbolic capital that fulfils the drive for the reproduction of the autonomy of the field and the specificity of its history of appreciation. Thus the restricted field must break with the public of non-producers as this specific capital is based on the recognition of the peer group i.e. others occupying similar positions and with similar interests (of autonomy). Bourdieu proposes then that the 'principles of differentiation regarded as most legitimate by an autonomous field are those which most completely express the specificity of a determinant type of practice' (117).

One of the useful aspects of this analysis is his emphasis on the struggle between the two principles of legitimacy. Rather than identifying one homogenous 'dominant culture' or 'mainstream', Bourdieu demonstrates that the competition between the two dominant sets of positions produce contradictory and conflicting values of cultural worth. Rather than being a hermetically sealed system, the struggles for dominance create the space (potentially) for new positions within the cultural field. Cultural value

and 'dominant tastes' are not fixed, but are in a process of continual conflict. Bourdieu argues that both the heteronomous and autonomous principles of hierachization would 'reign unchallenged' (38) were it not for the struggle between them. It is this struggle to impose dominant system of values (which are diametrically opposed to each other) which produces the shape of the field of cultural production. The history of position-takings produces the structure of possible positions which are taken up, or not, which in turn produces the structure of possible positions.

Central to Bourdieu's task in his analysis of the field of cultural production is to disassemble and explain historically the development of the elitist forms of aesthetic appreciation which circulate at the dominated, dominant 'cultural pole'. His emphasis therefore means that he says very little about the production and consumption of the ordinary public, i.e. those who do not possess 'specific' or 'general' capital. Instead he concentrates on the two oppositions of the dominant end of the field. This emphasis leads him to concentrate on the regressive (or elitist) aspects of the cultural pole's opposition to bourgeois cultural values. He offers no systematic consideration of the effect of the struggle which is at the heart of the field on those who are dominated and thus under-emphasises how the existence of ideas of cultural value based on opposition to the logic of economic profit can impact beyond the narrow confines of artistic specialisms and can circulate in other sub-fields whose own legitimacy is not based on the accumulation of the same form of 'specific' symbolic capital.¹⁶ He alludes to this issue when he discusses left-wing or 'social art', but does not draw the conclusion that there is another set of values at the dominated end of the field of cultural production that also circulate, influence and result in possible positions. Bourdieu argues that significant changes in the structure of the space of possible positions is generally a result of the impact on the cultural field from the overarching fields of politics and class power, and he offers the example of the 1848 revolutions in France as one such example of when artists moved to the left, 'towards social art' (58). Bourdieu considers the impact however, to be short lived, and here I would like to take issue with his analysis to suggest that 'social art' has its own history of possible positions which (from a dominated place in the field of culture) contributes to the struggle to define cultural worth. This space of possible positions is distinctive because, unlike the abstract formalism of high modernism, there have been renewed attempts historically to produce cultural objects (sometimes using modernist techniques) which do not abstract from the hopes and pains of ordinary people, but try to give expression to them. Furthermore, in this century, there

seem to have been at least three movements in the field of politics whose impact on the cultural field has changed the space of possible positions and these are: the women's movement, the civil rights movement and the anti-imperialist movements of the 1960s and 70s, each of which forced their way on to the cultural agenda.

This is not to part with Bourdieu's model in which the dominant sets of values dominate (although, not monolithically and in a permanent state of conflict). Instead it is to further investigate the impact of the contradictions of the competing dominant values on the specific groups who are dominated and to consider the spaces of possible positions operating at the dominated end of the field. This is not a task that Bourdieu sets himself, but the potential for such an investigation is implied in his schema.

The struggle between the dominated and dominant poles of the dominant end of the field of cultural production weakens both poles, since neither can achieve mastery. The dominant pole is dominant precisely because it is heteronomous; that is it is homologous with the dominance in the fields of politics, economics and class relations. This pole nevertheless faces constant challenges to their (economic) principles of legitimacy from the 'artistic pole' which questions the validity of bourgeois values and just as the heteronomous principles have influence, so too do these values which incorporate the linked (but potentially separable) values of autonomy (from the profit motive) and specialised (elitist) knowledge.

The heteronomous pole also faces the further contradiction that its own economic principles of legitimacy necessitates the search for markets and large scale production because this pole must produce for large enough audiences to reproduce their economic dominance. This is not to say that therefore 'the punters get what they want', because the large scale production must be such as to reproduce economic dominance *and* the values that legitimate their dominance - bourgeois values. Those who occupy positions strong in economic capital but poor in symbolic or specific capital are the most likely to invoke the language of 'popular demand', as they are least endowed with alternative concepts. The heteronomous pole must produce for a large market *and* reproduce their own values in the process of that production. D'acci's (1989) research into the phenomenon of *Cagney and Lacey* is an exemplary analysis of the struggle of large scale producers (in this case CBS) to reproduce their values against producers and writers with different sets of values¹⁷.

Fandom in the field of cultural production

The dual pressure of heteronomy and the challenges from the autonomous pole can potentially – and under certain circumstances of position-takings – lead to new positions which critique bourgeois values and break with elitism. This becomes particularly important when we come to consider the practices of dominated groups in the cultural sphere who can potentially occupy positions at least partially in line with the other set of principles of legitimacy. However, I will argue that fandom is situated at the dominated pole of the field of cultural production and that different fan cultures are influenced by either set of values emanating from the dominant pole and take positions accordingly. While many fans are excluded from the specific symbolic capital, they are not excluded from the concepts of legitimacy that it is based on. In other words they are not excluded from the concept of cultural production for other than economic gain, for this idea has to circulate widely in order to assert dominance. Similarly, fans may be excluded from actual possession of economic capital, but not from the *idea* of economic pursuit as a legitimating principle for cultural production. Those who adopt positions influenced by the autonomous values tend to reject commercialism and this is a valuable opposition to the heteronomous domination in the field. However, I will argue that the more a fandom is influenced by the autonomous pole, the more likely are the agents to occupy positions which reproduce the requirements of possession of a form of specific (sub cultural) capital and to see their fan practices in ‘pure’ terms, fandom-for-fandom’s-sake (in line with autonomous values and dispositions), rather than related to wider culture. Those fans who occupy positions in line with the dominant heteronomous principles tend to reproduce the legitimacy of economic values and accept commercial imperatives for culture and adopt positions in their own fandom in line with this. I find it very difficult to see how these fans’ positions can be seen as transgressive or oppositional.

Together, the heteronomous and autonomous poles at the dominant end of the field of cultural production provide the dynamic for the space of available positions and position-takings. Between them they dominate symbolic (autonomous) and general (economic) capital. But because of the contradictions and conflicts between them, that space is not closed to new positions. The dynamics of change within the autonomous pole, the pressures exerted from other fields in the heteronomous pole and the fact that the dominant raise two sets of conflicting principles which circulate beyond the positions which advocate them in an effort to dominate, produces more than one set of positions at the dominated end of the field of cultural production where fandom is located.

Conclusion

Vampire fandom, like all fandom, is situated at the *dominated* end of the field of cultural production, as the participants are excluded from specific capital and general capital. Vampire fandom does not stand outside of and in opposition to the field of cultural production, it is part of the field of cultural production and subject to its laws, at the heart of which is conflict over cultural legitimacy.

Chapter Nine will examine in detail the way that these dynamics impact upon vampire fandom in both Britain and the United States. It will demonstrate how the struggles within the cultural field are reproduced in the fan clubs, leading to attempts to establish fan hierarchies, taking positions through which to make ‘legitimate’ claims about the fandom, despite the fandom’s own rhetoric of inclusiveness. It will be argued that the closer a fan club’s orientation towards the heteronomous pole of the field, the more likely is the fan club to police the boundaries of the fandom, restricting economic activity. It will also be argued that fan clubs with a more autonomous orientation have a greater tendency to see their activities as removed from other fields and thus have little impact beyond their own boundaries, for ‘opposition’, ‘resistance’, or any other form of effectivity, but tend to become focused on their own sub field.

This assessment of the structure of vampire fandom comes from observations of two fan clubs and in-depth interviews with vampire fans outside of fan clubs as well as the personnel of the two vampire clubs. The following chapter will discuss how this empirical data has been handled in this thesis, its status and the rationale for applying to the ‘data’ the theoretical interpretations based on Bourdieu and others.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES TO WOMEN AND VAMPIRE FANDOM

Introduction

This piece of research is based on interviewing women vampire fans because it began with my shared concerns with many feminist critics who challenge the absence of the woman from accounts of ‘meaning’ in popular texts (Bobo, 1988; Brown, 1990; Byars, 1991; Gledhill, 1988; Penley, 1988; Pribram, 1988; Stacey, 1994). Stacey, for instance, argues ‘for the importance of putting spectators back into theories of female spectatorship’ because ‘if we are interested in female spectatorship then it is important to find out female spectators say’ (1995: 113). However, conducting research with groups of (in this case fan) audiences is not a matter of simply going out and talking to them. As Barker and Brooks point out in their study of *Judge Dredd* audiences, the research process is ‘inevitably messy, and researchers who say otherwise [...] are [...] concealing the mess and not thinking about its implications’ (1998:21). Stacey is actually quite candid about the way that ‘[t]he dead-ends, the U-turns, the frustrations and the despair tend to get written out as the logic of the research project is imposed retrospectively’ (99). Furthermore there are issues to do with processes involved in interviewing audiences, which must be considered, including: the type of interview method adopted; the types of generalisations that can be made; the relationship the researcher has with those who participate in the research; and the way that the research process affects the very questions being asked. This chapter will consider these methodological issues in terms of how they connect to this piece of research. It will begin with a discussion about this study’s relationship with ethnography as a methodology. While this research is not a piece of ethnography because it is primarily based on in-depth interviews, I did conduct a limited amount of participant observation with fan clubs and there are certain insights from ethnography which have contributed to the research process. However, this study is based on the qualitative ‘case study’ and the chapter will therefore move on to discuss the character of the case study and will offer considerations about the types of generalisations that can be made on the basis of this kind of research. It will argue for the validity of the unstructured, in-depth interview and will discuss how the material generated from the interviews will be handled not as ‘raw evidence’, but as interpretations of ‘active agents’ who are none the less located not simply in their own

narratives, but in concrete cultural contexts. I will then give an account of the type of interview method adopted in this research which involves considering feminist discussions of women interviewing women.

The practices of fandom that these women engage in and the way they discuss them has led me into considerations of what Ang characterises as the ‘embeddedness’ of the accounts of their activities ‘in a network of ongoing cultural practices and relationships’ (1989: 101). The notion of the embeddedness of audience activity has become a central concern of many researchers of the television audience, and much of this research claims methodologically to have ethnographic intentions (Brown, 1990; Morley, 1986; Gillespie, 1995; Gray, 1992; Hobson, 1989). Because of the way that studies have had an impact on my thinking about researching media audiences, this chapter will begin with a discussion of ethnography.

Ethnography

The study of television audiences has been concerned with developing an approach to audiences both as ‘active’ producers of meaning and as situated within the processes of particular power relations. In order to address this complex relationship, it has been argued that the analyst should adopt a holistic approach which can examine how culture is ‘lived’. There has, therefore, been an increased popularity of ethnography as a method and as a philosophy of research, with its emphasis on a ‘holistic’ approach. In a challenge to textual determinism, television studies have borrowed these methods from anthropology in order to locate the processes of television viewing within their comprehensive contexts. Researchers such as Morley and Gray, for example, have shifted emphasis from audience reactions to specific texts towards the idea of television viewing as ‘part of a complex set of domestic relationships’, (Geraghty, 1998: 144) while Gillespie (1995) has conducted research into the relationship that adolescent Punjabi Londoners in Southall have to different forms of television talk in their construction of their own complex social identities.

All of these studies have considered ethnography as a useful approach in order to ‘understand social life in relational and holistic terms’ (Gillespie, 1995: 53). Morley argues that in order to analyse television viewing, enmeshed as it is in a range of practices and processes, ‘in the first instance, the prime requirement is to provide an adequately “thick” description (cf. Geertz) of the complexities of this activity, and that an anthropological and broadly ethnographic perspective will be of some assistance in

achieving this perspective' (1992: 173). Gillespie also advocates 'thick description' and although there are differences as to precisely what kind of research is adequate to produce 'thick description', there is a shared view that the 'embeddedness' of the media in social life requires a genre of writing which refers to the 'complex whole formed by the interaction of various social relations and processes, which may be described as "culture"' (Gillespie, 1995: 54). For Morley, the ethnographic position will 'examine the dynamics of action and constraint in the daily activities and practices of the individuals and groups who are engaged in the socially situated production and consumption of meaning' (183).

However, despite these shared views, Morley and Gillespie seem to vary in terms of what constitutes valid methodological practices. While Morley argues that 'no single method has a monopoly of virtue' (13), and defends the 'interview method' (180), Gillespie insists that only 'ethnography can deliver empirically grounded knowledge of media audiences in a way that other, less socially encompassing methods cannot' (54). For Gillespie, ethnography consists of 'intensive, long-term participant observation' (54). She advocates this specific definition of ethnography in terms of methodological practice as an 'ethos' which emphasises 'social theory as emerging' rather than the testing of hypotheses (53). Gillespie's advocacy of long term participant observation as opposed to in-depth interviews, however, has a certain whiff of empiricism in its implied appeal to really-having-been-there, despite her criticisms of the notion of 'neutral' fact gathering. She suggests that eighteen months is the standard length of fieldwork required to 'attain the "emic" or "native" point of view' and that the ' "native" view envisioned by classic ethnographers is hardly to be grasped through a series of one-off "in-depth" interviews or brief periods of observation' (55).¹⁸

Yet Geertz (whose notion of 'thick description' Gillespie borrows) reminds us that researchers should not try to become the people they are studying, for 'only romantics and spies would seem to find any point in that' (1973: 13). For Geertz, the 'ethnographer inscribes social discourse, but what we inscribe is not "raw" social discourse. We do not have direct access, but only that which our informants can lead us into understanding by what they say and do' (20). Ethnographic data then is 'our own construction of other people's constructions of what they and others are up to' (9). A considerable part of ethnography from this perspective is about interpreting what people say about what they are doing, with no more empirical claim to 'truth' than other research techniques. The value of recent ethnographic approaches is precisely the

emphasis that the 'truths' produced by media research are 'always interpreted and constructed from a particular position' (Morley, 1992: 190). This is not to say that interpretation is somehow 'false', but that the basis on which judgements are made should be explicit.

The problems concerning the validity claims of qualitative research have been thoroughly tackled by Silverman who finds attachment to the notion of 'naturally occurring' data in such a context problematic (104). He argues that qualitative research is not 'a passive filter to truth about people' and insists that is a 'cop out' to simply let the informant's accounts 'speak for themselves' (90). Silverman argues that no interaction is untouched by human hands, and that qualitative methods are not just a case of description, because all data gathering is theory-impregnated. He argues that qualitative research cannot be justified in terms of its 'authentic' representation of experience. Instead, he proposes that what constitutes 'authenticity' is always culturally defined (92). In relation to feminist research, McRobbie also questions the authenticity claims made on the basis of conducting empirical research. She argues that, '[n]o research is carried out in a vacuum. The very questions we ask are always informed by the historical moment we inhabit' (1982: 48).

If ethnographic data is, therefore, as much subject to interpretation as any other form of knowledge production, then claims about its ability to deliver empirical knowledge of media audiences are problematic and as Morley reminds us, ethnographic accounts are 'essentially contestable' (188). Thus for example, the previous chapter contests the ethnographic interpretations of Bacon-Smith, particularly with reference to her reluctance to discuss the distinctions made by the fans in terms of anything other than the rhetoric of resistance. But if empirical work with audiences is fundamentally about 'interpretation' then as Ang puts it, '[w]hy approach audiences empirically at all' (1989: 110)? She suggests that such an approach is a 'reminder that reality is always more complicated and diverse than our theories can represent' (110). It is also worth pointing out that it was because her accounts of the interviews with key participants were adequately 'thick' that I was able to identify in Bacon-Smith's own 'evidence', descriptions which seemed to contradict her interpretations. In other words, this study does not share the post structuralist suspicion of the facticity of facts. In discussing post structuralist ethnography, Geertz warns against the 'moral hypochondria' of the 'diehard apostles of the hermeneutics of suspicion' (1988: 86) and he questions 'how anyone who believes all this can write anything at all, much less go on to publish it' (97). Instead,

this study rejects both a naïve declaration of ‘having been there’ as the basis of its authority and the confusion between the recognition of the inevitable subjective element in qualitative research with a view that all knowledge production is a form of falsification. For this study, qualitative research with women fans of the vampire was conducted, not to generate ‘raw’ social discourse, but to offer interpretations of their accounts through theoretical models that seem to address similar issues to those raised by the women themselves. The following six chapters aim to offer interpretations of the women’s accounts that are detailed enough in presenting their ‘talk’ (thick description) to substantiate the validity of my interpretation, but also to allow the reader to judge those interpretations. There will also be an attempt to locate those accounts in terms of the cultural contexts that the women themselves see as shaping their lives and how the women see their fandom in terms of their overall lives. Again though, the categories generated by the fans will not be left to ‘speak for themselves’ but will be related to relevant theoretical models, in other words, theories which conceptualise those cultural categories, in particular: theories of fandom, theories of femininity and of women’s viewing pleasures. Linking the accounts of the fans to theoretical models is justified on the basis of Silverman’s warning that, ‘[t]he attempt to describe things “as they are” is doomed to failure. Without *some* perspective or, at the very least, a set of animating questions, there is nothing to report. Contrary to crude empiricists, the facts *never* speak for themselves’ (1993: 36).

The point of conducting research with women fans, then, is to make the abstract theoretical models, which are necessary in order to try to isolate crucial features of social and cultural life, interact with specificity. But just as Silverman warns against ‘crude empiricism’ he also warns against premature definitions which can end up ‘deflecting attention away from the social processes through which the participants themselves assemble [...] features of their social world’ (36). This concern is echoed by researchers in the field of cultural studies. For example, Paul Willis argues for the need to keep our interpretations sensitive to concrete specificities, to allow ourselves the possibility to be ‘surprised’ (1980: 90). Ang concurs that researchers’ starting assumptions need to allow for the unexpected, ‘of reaching knowledge not prefigured in one’s starting paradigm (1989: 110). Talking to women (and men) vampire fans certainly did surprise me in a variety of ways. Particularly in New Orleans, I was surprised by the acrimony that existed between fans and the venom with which some fans attacked the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club (ARVLFC). I was equally surprised by the contempt that crept

into the voices of those at the centre of the ARVLFC when talking about ‘ordinary’ fans. This prompted me to listen again to the taped interviews with the British fans, and I found that similar tensions were evident in the British fan accounts also, although less starkly. This is not because the British are in some way more ‘moderate’ than Americans. Such national labels are hollow. Instead, the tensions were illuminated in sharp relief in New Orleans because the fan club itself was in the process of transition. Having started out as a small undertaking, based on volunteers, a hand printed fanzine with low production values, the fan club’s membership had grown rapidly and the fan club was now positioning itself as the officially ‘endorsed’ fan club, with several newsletters with higher production values and paid staff. These changes, discussed further in Chapter Nine, had an effect on the expectations of fandom articulated by those disillusioned with the club as well as those participating in the transformation. My theoretically informed starting assumptions, about the nature of fandom as an inclusive and democratic social formation, could only have been disrupted by entering the terrain of the fandom and discussing fandom with fans.

However, my attempts to provide the evidence for the interpretations offered, my concern with the location of the women’s fandom in larger cultural contexts and ‘being surprised’, do not mean this is an ethnographic study. My own long term interest in vampire fiction (particularly Anne Rice), in ‘dressing up’ and endless discussions with friends and students prior to embarking on this research certainly gives me a familiarity with the terrain (as well as a starting assumption that these people are not ‘weird’ or at least no more weird than any other group of people, including myself), but this does not constitute long-term participant observation, where the researcher is *studying* the culture she is observing and participating in and writing up ‘field notes’ at regular intervals. The ‘data’ collected for this research project comes from a small number of unstructured and lengthy in-depth interviews, 10 days observation of the participants of the ARVLFC and ex-members and four months participant observation of the London Vampire Group which included attending four meetings, a number of discussions with fans at the meeting and on the telephone, with the attendant writing up of ‘field notes’. I accept Gillespie’s argument that this is qualitative research rather than ‘ethnography’. As Gillespie rightly points out, ‘the in-depth, open-ended, semi-structured interview’ cannot genuinely be described as ethnography (55). Instead it ‘should often simply be called qualitative methods’ (54). Gillespie argues that interviewing is often given the label of ethnography as a ‘legitimizing device’ for studies that pay too little attention to

methodological issues. She supports the view that borrowing such labels without the accompanying content is ‘counterproductive for the development of interdisciplinary social theory construction’ (55). Gillespie argues that the ‘appropriation of the term has not involved a corresponding shift in, or any fundamental re-evaluation of, research practice’ (55). These critiques seem pertinent. Researchers engaged in in-depth interviews should label their work ‘qualitative’ rather than ‘ethnographic’. Furthermore, it is important for audience researchers using the in-depth interview technique to justify the appropriateness of this method for gathering data on audiences, and theorise its validity as a form of research activity in the construction of knowledge about audience activity in its own terms rather than borrowing the label of ethnography. But despite Gillespie’s valid critiques of label borrowing, it is quite a different matter to insist that in-depth interviews are an invalid method for any type of audience research, or cannot fulfil the intentions of the research.

Because this research is based on the deep interest that some women have for a particular figure in popular culture and a set of narratives that surround that figure, I am examining how the figure of the vampire, as dramatised on film, television and popular novels, is interpreted by a small section of the audience (a group of female vampire fans) who exist empirically as members of vampire societies and fan clubs, but do not feature in most theoretical considerations of the ‘meaning’ of the myth. I am also examining how the women’s accounts of their fandom and my own observations of fan clubs, chime with theories of fandom which almost unanimously consider it to be a mode of resistance. It will be argued that the use of the in-depth interview has been a very appropriate method for these kinds of questions because the empirical research in this study is intended to reflect on theoretical models and debates. There is a precedent in sociology for small-scale qualitative research to act as ‘a crucial test of a theory’ (Silverman, 1993: 160) and there are now a number of audience studies in the area of film and television for which qualitative data does just this (Bobo, 1988; Hallam and Marshment, 1995; Hobson, 1989; Stacey, 1994; Thomas, 2000). For example, Stacey’s research on women fans of Hollywood stars examines fan accounts in order ‘to critique or confirm existing [...] theory, and indeed produce new or refined categories which could usefully add to our understanding of how audiences watch films’ (112). This study, following on from Stacey, critically assesses existing theory and attempts to refine the conceptual categories through which fandoms are understood; the following section will therefore discuss this case study approach.

The sample

The qualitative research conducted for this thesis was a case study approach to field research. This means that a small sample of seven women vampire fans in Britain and six in New Orleans were interviewed in-depth and the two fan clubs to which many had connections were examined. This involved participant observation at meetings and gatherings and informal conversations with a number of people attending those meetings or on the telephone. The taped interviews were either conducted with individuals or in pairs depending on the preferences of those being interviewed and I was given permission by each interviewee to quote from the tapes in this thesis and in publications. I held discussion with the (female) president and (male) vice president of the ARVLFC and conducted a taped face-to-face- interview with George (male) who is one of the founding members of the London Vampire Group (LVG). The two ARVLFC interviews were not recorded and I asked both if I could include their comments in my research. The vice president was willing, but the president was hesitant, so this research will describe the encounter rather than quoting her directly. George, of The London Vampire Group, gave permission to use quotations from the tape. I had a number of 'chats' with further vampire fans, both women and men who knew I was conducting research. I did not ask for permission to include their words in the research, so although all of the non-recorded discussions were followed by the extensive writing up of field notes, these further discussions inform the overall picture and will not be quoted directly.

This was not a random sample; it was a self-selecting sample of women who responded to adverts I had placed in directed publications (see appendix two). Advertising for interviewees is a well-established practice among media audience researchers (Ang, 1985; Dinsmore, 1998; Taylor, 1989) but does 'attract those who are keenly involved in a particular process and want to talk about it' (Geraghty, 1998: 145). My advert asked women to write to me if they were interested in participating in this research). I received a total of 33 letters of introduction from fans in Britain and the USA (the USA letters were via Email) and, as I will describe in the next chapter, made further contacts thereafter. A questionnaire was then sent to each of the letter writers and I received a total of 35 questionnaires which asked the women to give their name, occupation, marital status and educational qualifications initially. The questionnaire then asked the respondent to identify likes and dislikes in vampire fiction and comment on activities they were involved in (see appendix three). Because the intention of the

questionnaire was intended less as a fact gathering exercise and more as a way of starting the women thinking about their interest in the vampire, I have not tabulated the results of the questionnaire. Instead I have written profiles of each of the women that I interviewed on tape (see appendix one). The interviews took place in a variety of settings which, in each case, was chosen by the interviewees and the venues included: pubs, living rooms, bedrooms, cafes, B&B's, Averbury Stone Circle, and fan club meeting places. Scholars differ about the most appropriate venue for in-depth interviews. Those conducting research on domestic viewing argue that it is important to conduct research in its domestic context (Morley, 1986; Gray, 1992). Others prefer public spaces (Hobson, 1989; Thomas, 2000). I felt that it was important for the respondent to decide on the venue where they would feel most comfortable and the public/ private question varied between individuals. Thomas argues that intruding on the intimacy of the domestic space can be problematic, particularly where there is a lack of compatibility between the researcher and the fan. She suggests that the public space 'protect[s] both myself and my respondents from a difficult or negative experience' (Thomas, 2000: 104). I had at least one negative experience in a domestic setting which had an impact on the project. Dana, who was my key contact in New Orleans, had invited Susie and me to her house for lunch to be followed by our interview. After the interview I was bitten by her German Shepard dog which immediately ended the day and effectively ended our contact. Dana rang to apologise the following day but did not respond to any of the emails I sent her subsequently. Therefore any ability to follow up research in New Orleans through my contact with Dana, once I returned to London, was lost. In this case, Thomas' warning about interviews in the domestic context seem valid. However, during my interview with Andrea, it was significant that she chose to be interviewed in her bedroom. As will be discussed further in Chapter Seven, Andrea's interview took place while she was dressing in her vampire gear. It was clearly important to the story that she wanted to tell that we witness her transformation from her 'frump gear', as she puts it, into one of her vampire outfits. Also, because making these outfits was one of her main interests, it was important for her to be able to show us the many outfits in her closet that she had made by hand. I would therefore defend the practice of allowing the interviewee to choose the interview location, because the venue may have an important bearing on the story she wants to tell. Alasuutari argues that all speech is 'situated' (1995: 86) including that spoken in an interview situation and that 'interviewer and interviewee co-produce the "in-depth interview"' (86). Thus the

situations and settings that interviewees' choose to speak in have meaning and can add to our understanding of what they want to say.

The intensive concentration on small numbers of fans and two fan clubs out of a possible dozen or so in the US and Britain constitutes this research as a case study rather than providing a full empirical picture of British and American vampire fandom and women vampire fans. The fact that the thesis is organised as a case study has consequences for the types of generalisations that will be offered.

The case study

All of the women interviewed were deeply committed to the object of fandom and felt the urge to offer explanations. The motivation of these women fans and the small size of the 'sample' has implications for the kind of data generated by the interviews. Scholars interested in qualitative research with small populations have pointed to the problem of how representative case study findings are (Bryman, 1988, Hammersley, 1992, Silverman 1993). As Silverman puts it, 'the problem of "representativeness" is a perennial worry of case-study researchers' (1993, 160). The accounts and interpretations offered in this thesis are provided by those of an engaged perspective rather than a less engaged perspective; they are not a 'typical' audience of vampire fictions (if such a categorisation is possible). Audience researchers have pointed to the difficulties in accessing audiences who are not highly motivated by the subject (Barker and Brooks, 1998; Dinsmore, 1998). Others have commented upon the problems of producing overly homogeneous samples (Geraghty, 1998; Seiter, 1995). I will not be generalising from the accounts offered by this small, motivated selection of female vampire fans to offer propositions about the vampire's gendered cultural meaning, nor will I be suggesting that the vampire has a common significance to all women, not least because most women are not vampire fans. Indeed, many feminists have been justifiably critical of tendencies to homogenise all women and their differing experiences, (hooks, 1984; Carby, 1982; Wallace, 1990; Young, 1996). Furthermore, Geertz also raises concerns about the importance of being clear about the claims that can be substantiated by small scale quantitative work. He argues that the problem of getting from a multitude of ethnographic miniatures to large 'culture scapes' has often been solved badly (1973: 210). For Geertz, small scale studies 'do not offer small pictures of the great world' and warns against concluding that 'Jonesville-is-the-USA' or 'Easter island-is-a-test-case' (22). For Geertz, small phenomena are 'not the world in a tea cup' (23). However, he

does argue that small facts speak to large issues and considers it equally problematic to avoid generalisation because this reproduces the notion that the accounts are simply authentic and unmediated ‘truths’ about the women’s experiences. However, while the size of the sample cannot constitute an empirical account of the world of fandom, generalizations will be made and the following section will discuss what kind of generalizations can validly be made.

Generalizing

Silverman suggests productive ways to consider the problem of ‘representativeness’ and small-scale research. He argues that rather than seeing the sample as ‘the world in a tea cup’, small-scale research can offer insights into ‘*theoretical* propositions rather than to *populations* or universes’ (1993, 160). Hallam and Marshment (1995) do just this in their small study of women viewers of *Oranges Are Not The Only Fruit* (BBC 1990). While the sample in this thesis is considerably larger than that of Hallam and Marshment, their manner of approaching small samples is a useful starting point. They argue that their sample of eight women ‘precludes useful sociological categorisation’ (3) so they use the women’s accounts of their experiences of watching the series to reflect on concepts in feminist cultural theory, particularly the notion of ‘ordinary’ women as ‘other’ to feminist academics. In other words, the case study pointed to a conceptual weakness. Similarly this thesis, through the accounts given by the women fans, reflects on theoretical discussions of the meaning of the vampire. It has been argued in the first chapter of this thesis that academic writing on the meaning of the vampire often focuses on masculine concerns and ignores femininity. These absences have taken place through the deployment of psychoanalytic textual analysis and it was suggested that feminist theories of melodrama and theories of the gothic offer potential readings which reinsert the female viewer/reader in ways that do not position her as a dupe of mass culture. The way these theories concur with the fan readings and help to make sense of them will be the content of Chapter Five, through an examination of the kinds of thing the women say themselves of their engagement. Through discussions with women fans, then, this thesis is reflecting on theories about spectatorship and audience engagements.

Alongside theories of the vampire and spectatorship, this thesis, (through the examination of two vampire fan clubs), reflects critically on theories of fandom which deploy Bourdieu and de Certeau to theorise fandom as semiotic resistance. This thesis then suggests an alternative theoretical model which proposes a more consistent

deployment of Bourdieu. Like Hallam and Marshment's study, the 'evidence' highlights conceptual problems and this study then goes on to critique existing theoretical models. The alternative model of fandom is therefore not presented as an empirical fact, based on a large-scale representative sample of different forms of media fandom. In fact no study of fandom conducts large-scale research. All are based on one or two fandoms and present their theories of resistance on the basis of often very small groups of fans. Instead, this thesis offers a theoretical proposition about the character of fandom that I was led into by the kinds of things the fans said to me. Further research will have to be conducted with larger numbers of fan groups in order to 'prove' a Bourdieuan approach to fandom correct. The final chapter outlines this alternative model, through a discussion of the disparity I discovered between the academic celebrations of fandom as resistance and the struggles that fans themselves recognise are a characteristic of fandom.

But this thesis does not only reflect on existing theory. There is also an examination of and attempt to explain the women's fandom, grounded in their own accounts of what they are up to. So while this thesis offers no generalised account of the vampire's cultural significance, it will be argued that the fans' choice of this figure has to do with their experiences in culture. The accounts will not therefore be considered as evidence of individuals, unstructured by social relations, using the image to gratify needs. Instead, the thesis addresses the common attitude expressed by these women fans of their favoured texts, the images of 'outsiderdom' they appropriate from the 'sympathetic vampire' and their practices of fandom and self they engage in. It will be argued in Chapter Six that part of the pleasure in appropriating vampiric symbols is in providing the fans with the means of handling ambivalent cultural categories such as 'femininity' and 'self'.

The interview approach

In defending 'the interview' as opposed to observation, David Morley argues:

I may be observed to be sitting, staring at the TV screen, but this behaviour would be equally compatible with total fascination or total boredom on my part - and the distinction will not necessarily be readily accessible from observed behavioural clues. Moreover, should you wish to understand what I am doing, it would probably be as well to ask me. I may well, of course, lie to you or otherwise misrepresent my thoughts or feelings, for any number of purposes, but at least through my verbal responses, you will begin to get some kind of access to the kinds of language, the criteria of distinction and the types of categorizations, through which I construct my conscious world.

Without these clues my TV (or other behaviour) will necessarily remain opaque (1989:5).

Morley argues that the interview method should therefore be defended both in terms of the access given to the researcher of the respondents, 'conscious opinions and statements' and the 'linguistic terms and categories' (25) that respondents use in understanding their own activities. Interviews with women vampire fans have been conducted in this research for precisely these reasons. Furthermore, Barker and Brooks' discussion of different audiences of the *Judge Dredd* film offers a detailed examination of the latter, which they label the 'vocabularies of involvement and pleasure' which arise from the talk of those they interviewed. For Barker and Brooks, analysing talk is not simply a question of accounting for the respondents' categories, it is also a question of recognising 'talk as "thinking things through" rather than just enunciating attitudes' (1998: 122). For these researchers, the 'repertoires of response' available to members of society (which are provided by the structuring contexts) are not set permanently within fixed boundaries. Any full account of 'talk' must recognise the conditions which limit responses, but must also incorporate an understanding of how socially available repertoires of responses can and do change. Barker and Brooks argue that they want to leave a 'space for considering those who [...] exert challenges and try to redefine for others how something should be thought and talked about' (122). By drawing on Bourdieu's account of the way that social agents take positions in the cultural field, I will suggest in the chapters to follow, that 'talk' is also a means of articulating one's position and disposition in the field. However, Williams and Garnham (1980) criticise Bourdieu for the inability of his model of the cultural field to account for potential challenges that do not simply change the field of positions but overthrow the system of power and domination which constitutes it as a field. The possible challenges to 'repertoires of responses' that Barker and Brooks raise, address this issue and are an important reminder against reifying the field of culture. Despite the validity of this critique, however, I deem Bourdieu's analysis of the cultural field to offer a powerful explanation for the existing cultural relations and a means of considering the dynamics of the field in terms of both the structuring context and human agency. Furthermore the notion of articulating positions is a useful means for understanding the accounts given by fans and the stark differences between those of fan club personnel and 'ordinary' fans. This thesis considers the fans' talk to be both a means of articulating their experiences in culture and of articulating the positions they have taken from within the space of possible positions

available in the sub field of vampire fandom. It was my intention that my assessment of the kind of talk that fans engaged in during interviews would arise not from pre-existing theoretical models, however, but would be led by the kinds of things the fans said. The kind of interview method that I adopted, then, is an important issue and will be discussed in the next section.

What kind of interviews

The fourteen interviews carried out were unstructured, in-depth and lasted between two and four hours. I did not have an interview schedule, with which to direct the interview and I did not attempt to move the conversation on if I felt it was straying from the topic. After initial introductions, an explanation of what I was doing the research for and a request to tape the interview, I turned on the tape recorder and asked the interviewee to 'tell me her story'. This seemed an appropriate way to start the interview because it is a format the most people are familiar with and, as it is 'their' story, it confers status and authority on the respondent and undermines the idea that I may be a kind of 'vampire expert' to whom they should defer. But also it is the way *Interview With the Vampire* begins; a journalist asking Louis to tell him his story on tape. Most of the respondents recognised this and commented humorously about it, which helped to put both interviewee and interviewer at ease. The validity of the unstructured or semi-structured interview is now a well-established way of ensuring the interviewee-led character of the interview situation. (Finch, 1984; Gray, 1992; Hobson, 1990; Morley, 1986; Oakley, 1981). The validity of such an approach was brought home to me when I conducted pilot interviews at the very beginning of the research process. The pilot interviews were structured, with schedules of questions. During one particular interview, I found that the interviewee began to tell me certain stories about her interest in the vampire only after the tape was turned off, the interview was 'officially' over and I had stopped asking her questions. When I later listened to the tape of the interview I realised that there were a number of occasions when the woman began to reveal interesting things to me which were quickly shut down by my blundering attachment to the next question on 'my' schedule. Conducting a pilot was a crucial initial step in developing an adequate approach to interviewing. Like Gray's study, an initial 'important dimension' of this study is 'the way that women make sense out of their own experience' (32), as opposed to the textual academic accounts which disregard issues of feminine engagement. Thus I

adopted Gray's approach that the 'open' interview 'allows respondents to raise issues and topics which they feel are important to the subject of the study, and in this way participate in the research' (32).

The 'open' or unstructured character of the interviews account for their length, since the topics raised by the interviewees were extensive. But rather than considering this as problematic straying from the question, I consider it to be an example of the way in which these women fans consider their interest in the vampire to be embedded in the whole range of their experiences of life which make up their 'story'. Like Gray, (and Stacey and Morley as discussed above), I was less concerned with whether the women were telling me the truth and more interested in the way the women told me their story; I was interested in 'their way of articulating that experience' (33). Often, what initially may have been considered to be straying from the topic, ended up demonstrating the respondent's complex understanding of her relationship to the figure of the vampire. This issue is explored in Chapter Five, in terms of the pain revealed about 'not fitting in', and in Chapter Eight in terms of experiencing the death of parents and long term illnesses of offspring. There is also an examination of how the women understand their appropriation of the figure of the vampire as raising a series of possibilities about self which often begin with accounts of pain, but move on.

As explained above, interviews were conducted individually, or in pairs, depending on the wishes of the respondent. On occasions, very close friends or lovers wished to be interviewed together. Hobson suggests that 'group dynamics which have already been established will continue to operate in any group discussion' (1989: 153). This seems to be borne out in my discussion with pairs of fans. Like Hobson, I regularly found that these interviews were characterised by quick exchanges and familiar ground being revisited. With pairs of fans, telling me their 'story' was not only about relating individual attitudes and experiences, but was crucially about the relationship between the two women so that 'self' seemed to be defined in relation to another. The pairs perceived their story as a common story, which is why they wanted to be interviewed together. In these circumstances the women usually adopted one of the Rice vampires as 'most like me' and one that is 'most like her' and had a tendency to complete each other's sentences, demonstrating closeness and familiarity. Yet while this research has shared the feminist audience studies' concern with, as Geraghty puts it, 'giving women a voice' (1996: 318), this study is not uncritical of aspects of the fans' accounts. This raises questions about empathy between interviewer and interviewee which have been

important to feminists who employ the interview method and the following section will therefore discuss my position in relation to this issue.

Rapport and empathy

The idea of women sharing a set of gendered experiences, as the basis for rapport and empathy between interviewer and respondent, is common. Finch sums up this position when she argues that when the both the interviewee and interviewer are women there is going to be better rapport 'because both parties share a subordinate structural position by virtue of their gender'. For Finch this 'creates the possibility that a particular kind of identification will develop' (1984: 76). Such an approach springs from the notion of feminist sociology as an 'emancipator sociology' (Acker et. al., 1983: 424), which includes consciousness-raising for the researched and the researcher (Wise 1987). Griffiths, (1980) Griffin (1995), Oakley (1981) and Finch (1984) all concur that 'talking' in the research process is empowering, because women's experiences, usually unspoken and unacknowledged, are exchanged. My approach shares the feminist concern with making women's experience visible, particularly female relationships with areas of popular culture (such as horror and vampire fiction), which are considered to be 'male'. But there are common attitudes and accounts of the research experience with women in feminist researched that I do not share. For example, I part company with feminist consciousness raising intentions in research. Wise's response to Oakley and Finch's claims of the empowering aspect of feminist research interviewing women sums up the problem. Wise writes:

Oakley's and Finch's accounts demonstrate how [...] women research subjects can gain [...] a sense of self esteem and so on in research based on one to one interviews. Few feminist researchers would deny that they too are changed by their research relationships, however, it seems clear that the general direction of change is of the women subjects who change in the direction of the researcher's way of thinking. Very few pieces of feminist research conclude with the researcher re-evaluating her feminist understanding of the world, whereas many conclude with research subjects changed 'for the better' (80).

The condescending tone, which Wise clearly summarises, is evidenced in Griffiths' research about school girl friendships. Griffiths recalls her worries about influencing the girls in a negative way:

I was worried that myself and the class teacher [...] both pregnant at the same time, were providing negative role models, that is, placing undue emphasis on

having children, and thus reinforcing the traditionally feminine interest many of the girls already expressed in babies and childcare (23).

Not only does it seem that she is overemphasising her influence on her respondents, it is also hard to understand why her pregnancy is not for her in contradiction to her feminist principles, but for others it is reinforcing 'traditionally feminine interests'. Griffiths' concerns seem to display the very 'otherness' identified and challenged by Hallam and Marshment. Surely it is not children per se (or wanting to have them) which is the problem, but the privatised and gendered nature of childcare and domestic labour which deprives women of alternative social roles. If that is what she was worried about it, then perhaps she should have discussed it with the girls.¹⁹ But this raises issues about influencing the research situation, for paradoxically feminist researchers want to empower their respondents through consciousness raising (and thus have an influence), but simultaneously want to give women a voice in their own terms and value that voice, which means not influencing the research situation. These goals are at odds with each other and the paradox has led both to construing female respondents who are not perhaps overtly feminists as 'other' or alternatively has resulted in a problematic sense of 'oneness' and homogeneity with one's respondents.

Oakley was an early advocate of the participatory politics of women interviewing women. She usefully questioned the traditional interview method which demanded an objective stance and an insistence that the interviewer should not become involved, offer opinions or disclose personal details. Her interview practice did just the opposite. For Oakley, interviewing women is a pleasurable experience as well as the means for giving women a voice. She talks of the sense of friendship and empathy that developed in the process of interviewing women and comments that 'four have become close friends' (46). Feminists conducting audience research have discussed similar experiences. (Hobson, 1989; Gray, 1992; Seiter et al 1989). For example, Seiter et al argue that while they may be 'other' to the women soap fan in their research in terms of nationality, as academics and as employers, 'gender provided a position of 'sameness' in relation to our informants' (243).²⁰ Gray also discusses this 'shared position' (34) with her informants both in terms of the empathy generated and social location. The question of automatic empathy between female academic and the women she interviews with the attendant ideas of 'shared knowledges' (Gray, 1995: 161) was queried in the early 1980s by both McRobbie and Wise. McRobbie's oft quoted point that feminism 'forces us to locate our own auto-biographies and our experiences inside the questions we might want to ask, so

that we continually do feel with the women we are studying' (1982: 52) is directly followed by a warning that does not get quoted:

[t]hat said, feminism shouldn't be taken as a password misleading us into a false notion of 'oneness' with all women purely on the grounds of gender. No matter how much our past personal experience figures and feeds into the research programme, we can't possibly assume that it necessarily corresponds in any way to that of the research 'subjects' (52).

Similarly, in commenting specifically on feminist audience research, Brunsdon argues the following:

[b]ecause the definition of feminist methodology frequently involves particular political understandings of the way in which the researcher herself inhabits the gender category woman, we have, in much feminist research, a certain fluidity of pronouns. This blurring is of course a feature of some sociologies – what I wish to do here is to point to the peculiar force that the first-person pronoun has in feminist discourse, a force which often has the resonance of authenticity (1989: 124).

The category of experience, or rather the accounting of experience by women fans, is important to this study, for as McRobbie points out, it is an important dimension of 'history from below' (47). But for this thesis, the experience of fans is framed by material conditions, some of which the fans contribute to and some of which exist beyond their influence. Furthermore, I dispute the notion that my experiences are identical to my respondents and the claim that without this empathy a full understanding of the women's fandom is impossible.

Wise also problematises the notion of sharing experiences, frames of reference, and friendships with one's women informants as a basis for the authority of the research.

Discussing Oakley's work directly she asks:

The reciprocity and transition to friendship that she describes are no doubt pleasant as well as effective, but is such a relationship really honest? In a sense, this approach will only work when research is on women of similar status, with whom the researcher happens to share an unproblematic relationship. But what does Oakley do with the women that she does not like, or who don't like her, or those whose perceptions of their lives differ from hers (1987, 66)?

Gray actually decided to share as much common ground with her informants as possible, not simply to produce a homogenous sample for research purposes, but because she says she was influenced by feminist ideas about 'the power of the researcher' and felt 'unwilling as a white researcher, to attempt to impose myself and my research on Black and Asian women in a racist society' (Gray, 1995: 161). She also considers 'shared knowledges' and a shared 'cultural "reservoir"' as crucial to the kind of methods she

employed. Thus she seems to have solved Wise's problem about women 'whose perception of life differs from hers' (161).

In the terms of much feminist research, I should have had a considerable amount in common with my respondents, both in terms of sharing the experience of gender and of sharing their cultural interest in the vampire. But the women fans themselves did not share identical experiences of fandom as is evidenced in the antagonisms between the official and unofficial fans (discussed in Chapters Eight and Nine). As I argue in the following chapter, there were times when my own interest in the vampire was important in terms of gaining respondents' trust. But attempting to be at one with all of my respondents (and their differing perspectives) would have made it impossible to analyse the differences between them. Furthermore, there were interview moments which were uncomfortable and tense and occasional moments of outright hostility, and these came to the fore particularly around issues of race. Unlike Gray, I did not set out to share the ethnicity with the women I would interview; yet all my respondents, except one Asian American woman, were white. A number of the fans expressed racist views, ranging from 'soft' racism, which permeates white culture and is often based on ignorance and misguided assumptions to one 'die-hard' racist. The women expressing either set of views did not consider themselves to be making controversial statements and, because of our shared 'cultural reservoir' and 'rapport' as white women, assumed that I would not be provoked by them. Gray also comments that some of her informants expressed racist ideas. She writes, '[i]n these circumstances it is almost impossible to keep nodding encouragements [...] but to contradict and enter into an argument would be equally problematic for the interview. The strategy I adopted was to respond honestly if my views were sought, thereby risking offence, or, more commonly, to gently move the conversation on to different areas' (1995: 163). Feminist approaches to women interviewing women seem to have become ensnared in the issues of rapport and empathy, that is, with getting on with one's informants, for, I would have thought that attempting some consciousness raising wouldn't go amiss in the context of challenging the racist views held by fellow white women. Gray is correct in her assessment that entering into an argument may be detrimental to the interview as I discovered when one woman with very racist views made some rather nasty comments and our argument became heated and acrimonious and we had no further contact;²¹ thus in having to choose between my wider political commitments and the research, I chose the former. Feminist researchers are rightly concerned with according primacy to the views of their

participants, who have often been excluded or marginalized from public discourse, but this should not be at the expense of other groups in society who are also marginalized. Black feminist critiques of white feminist notions of shared experience are well established and widely known (Carby, 1982; hooks, 1981; Wallace 1990) and in ignoring racism, white feminists justify the strong tone of some of those criticisms. Wise comments appropriately that ‘Oakley, like so many other feminist theorists, seems to ignore the fact that sometimes it is appropriate to say negative as well as positive things about women, and what do the women, who may have become her friends, or not, make of that?’ (1987: 66). This comment is not only applicable to feminist audience research, but also to much research into fandom where ‘resistance’ claims are accompanied by an absence of a discussion of race, and negative comments about fans are rare.

Furthermore, Bobo and Seiter have discussed the ‘whiteness’ of most samples in audience studies (1998). They suggest that white researchers ought to ‘work harder to consider the problems of racial and ethnic difference’ (172) and at trying to contact black respondents. The vampire fandom that I encountered was very much a white subculture, although it is likely there have been considerable numbers of black readers of Rice’s best selling *Vampire Chronicles*. This, I think, adds another dimension to the argument against considering fandom as an all-inclusive space, which is not to say that all white vampire fans are racist. Rather that fandom and racism can coexist. Fandom as a cultural formation does not in the US or Britain lead to a questioning of racism, one of the major social divisions in both countries that keep the marginalized separated, and the system of domination in place.

Many cultural anthropologists have discussed the problems with having too much empathy with ones informants, or what is called ‘going native’ (not a very helpful phrase) (Griffiths, 1995; Woods, 1986; Acker et. al., 1983; Campbell, 1993). Peter Woods (1986) for instance, stresses the dangers of according primacy to the views of a particular group as an example of ‘going native’ (34-38). He suggests that there is a difference between attempting to understand behaviour and condoning it. Similarly, Griffiths argues that such a perspective can lead to uncritical celebrations of the racist or sexist behaviour of the primary group being researched. In the interviews conducted and analysed in this research, I attempted to strike a balance between giving women vampire fans a voice and carrying out a systematic examination of their views. The open ended, in-depth interview approach that I adopted was intended to allow the categories and themes to emerge from the interviewees’ own frames of reference, and, while I attempted

to understand and indeed empathise with their perspectives, I also scrutinized them and the following chapters offer some criticisms of some the positions articulated by women vampire fans. The following section will offer an account of how the fan accounts were categorised in order that this analysis could take place.

Data analysis

This section will discuss how the interviews conducted for this research were analysed as ‘data’. Van Zoonen argues that discussion of the analysis of data ‘is a neglected area in interpretative research’ (1994: 140) and that it is rare to find ‘satisfactory sections on research designs in the recent upsurge of qualitative projects’ (140). However, as many qualitative researchers note, because the ‘data’ involved in qualitative research is to do with the complexities of language rather than numbers, this kind of analysis can be difficult to wield (Barker and Brooks, 1998; Miles and Huberman, 1994; Potter and Wetherell, 1984; van Zoonen, 1994). For instance, questions of how language produces meaning comes to the fore in such studies. Is language a reflection of or constructive of peoples cognitive and emotional states? Will one engage in textual criticism, discourse analysis, or linguistic analysis? Is one concerned primarily with what has been said or how it has been said? In this study, the answers to these questions stem from the manner in which this data was gathered, (discussed above) where unstructured open ended interviews allowed the categories and frameworks of interpretations emerge from the accounts of the fans themselves. The language used by the women whom I interviewed (sometimes singly, sometimes in pairs) was situated by that context and thus the fans were offering both reflections of their experiences and attitudes, as well as constructing accounts of that experience in the process of the interview. Thus I was interested in what the women said and how they said it. Van Zoonen argues that taking the view that language operates both as reflection and as construction ‘implies that the analysis of interviews should focus on what has been said, how it has been said, and what is achieved by saying it in that particular manner’ (143). What follows is an account of how this process of analysis was conducted in this research.

The interviews in this study were dissected according to Miles and Huberman’s method of coding. They argue that ‘data collection is inescapably a *selective* process’ and ‘that you cannot and do not “get it all”’ (56). Thus their approach to coding interviews is broadly similar to the notion of interpretation adopted in this study

(discussed above) although there are minor differences which will be indicated. Miles and Huberman argue that dissecting interviews ‘meaningfully’, ‘while keeping the relations between the parts intact, is the stuff of analysis’ (56). They argue that coding interviews is a method of achieving this. For Miles and Huberman ‘[c]odes are tags or labels for assigning units of meaning to the [...] material’ and they advise that codes are ‘usually attached to “chunks” of varying sizes - words, phrases, sentences, whole paragraphs, connected or unconnected to a specific setting’ (56). Miles and Huberman suggest that researchers combine ‘first level coding’ with ‘pattern coding’ (65). First level coding, according to Miles and Huberman, involves ‘creating a provisional “start list” of codes prior to field work’ (58). This list, they argue, ‘comes from the conceptual framework, list of research questions, hypotheses, problems areas, and/or key variables that the researcher brings to the study’ (58). The idea of having pre-set codes with which to approach my interviews did not seem in keeping with my intention of letting the fans own conceptual categories lead the interpretation. Thus, instead of a pre-set start list, I listened to the tapes of interviews conducted in Britain (before travelling to New Orleans) several times before creating a start list for each tape, comparing the codes for each tape and devising a start list based on codes that overlapped significantly between the tapes. This initial list included the following codes (or common topics of conversation): self, texts, fan activity, opinion, fan clubs, events, friends/family. Although there was often considerable overlap between these codes, this initial list enabled me to begin to analyse the women fans’ talk. I then listened to each tape again, transcribing small chunks of text that related to each of the initial codes. Again these chunks were compared between each interview to establish pattern codes which allowed me to group themes into smaller sub themes. For instance, pattern code sub topics under the code ‘text’ involved concepts such as ‘favourites’, ‘dislikes’, ‘vampire characteristics’. These in turn were broken into further pattern sub codes. Under ‘favourites’ were placed codes such as ‘sympathy’, ‘gothic’, and ‘romance’. Each of these tertiary sub codes were placed on an index card with short quotes from each of the interviewees.

Miles and Huberman argue that an ‘operative coding scheme is not a catalogue of disjointed descriptors or a set of logically related units and sub units, but rather a conceptual web, including larger meanings and their constitutive characteristics’ (63). They recommend NUDIST to display the coding of schemes hierarchically or Sem Net to display the structure in a network. Rather than using one of these software packages, I

created a paper based web network based on seven pieces of poster board each labelled with one of the initial codes. Onto these I stuck a number of A4 sized envelopes labelled with the relevant secondary codes. Into these envelopes went my index cards containing tertiary sub codes and short chunks transcribed from each interview. This arrangement allowed me to code interviews throughout the process of the field work rather than at the end. Miles and Huberman recommend such an approach for they argue that coding 'drives the ongoing data collection. It is form of early (and continuing) analysis. It typically leads to a reshaping of your perspective and your instrumentation for the next pass' (65). Furthermore, it enabled me to move sub codes back and forth in order to interrogate material in a new way, or to add codes as new themes emerged. Miles and Huberman discuss just such processes in the ongoing and later cycles of the study. Borrowing from Lincoln and Guba (1985), they identify four such procedures: '1. "filling in": adding codes, reconstructing a coherent scheme as new insights emerge and new ways of looking at the data set emerge; 2. "extension": returning to materials coded earlier and interrogating them in a new way, with a new theme, construct, or relationship; 3. "bridging": seeing a new or previously not understood relationship [...]; 4. "surfacing": identifying new categories' (62). This study engaged in each of these processes (although, again, they are often so intertwined that it is difficult to separate them into these discrete named procedures). For instance my fieldwork in New Orleans not only raised new sub codes to be added under the initial code of 'fan club' because of the stark acrimony between fans, but also lead me to re-examine my existing interviews as well as prompting me to conduct further interviews with key fan club personnel. This necessarily involved combining 'filling in', 'extending', 'bridging' and 'surfacing'.

When all of the interviews had been conducted and before the final writing up of the thesis began (although 'work in progress' had been written up throughout, including material for publication) I had the interviews professionally transcribed. I went through these transcripts blocking out the initial codes and secondary and tertiary pattern sub codes in pencil, checking for significant gaps and absences to ensure that the analysis conducted dealt systematically with each interview and established viable links between them. It also indicated which parts of each interview traversed a number of codes, indicating the importance of such pieces of 'talk' to the themes analysed in this thesis.²² This acted as a final check in the process of analysis and when I was satisfied with this operation I identified quotations from the transcripts for inclusion in the thesis.

Having outlined the method of data analysis engaged in this study, I would like to re-emphasise that the kind of qualitative analysis engaged in here is necessarily an interpretative activity. As van Zoonen argues, '[n]o matter how refined and systematic the analytic procedure used to extract information from qualitative data, making sense of language is an interpretative activity' (143). This perspective is shared by Ang, Morley, Geertz and Silverman whose insights underpin the 'interpretative' approach outlined in this chapter. I am not presenting interview talk as raw social discourse or empirical data that speaks for itself. As has been argued, the data in this thesis is concerned with reflections on theory through an analysis of a specific section of the audience for the vampire. In the analysis that follows however, the intention has been to provide an adequate amount of the fans own interpretations (their words and language) with which to judge my own interpretations and conceptualisations.

Practical Issues

Chapters Five to Nine involve considerable amounts of quotation from the fans who were interviewed for this research and I would like to clarify a number of issues for the reader. Each of the interviewees have been given pseudonyms to preserve their anonymity. The interview tapes were professionally transcribed by an audio secretarial service, Prime Secretarial Services in North London. Each transcript is entitled by the pseudonym or (when interviews took place with pairs) pairs of pseudonyms of the interviewees. The only exception is Hannah's interview transcript which contains contributions from Melinda which I quoted. Where this is the case I have indicated that the words come from Hannah's tape. In all other cases, I have used the interviewee's pseudonym in the preceding sentence or at the beginning of each quotation in order to indicate which transcript is being quoted. The transcribers included 'line' numbers in the transcripts which accrue on the basis of the interchange between speakers on each recording. These line numbers appear in brackets at the end of each quotation in the text of this thesis in order to provide references for the material. I have not included the transcripts in an appendix because each transcript is over thirty pages in length and could only be contained in a further volume. Instead, I have attached the first five pages of Melinda's transcript in appendix four in order to give a flavour of the interview method I employed. Finally, the transcribers used codes which I have adopted in the material I quote in this thesis as follows:

... three dots refer to a pause on the part of the speaker. This is distinguished from ellipses from a quotation by the inclusion of brackets - [...].

— an em dash refers to an inhalation or exhalation of breath or other non-language sound.

() empty brackets refer to a word or words on the recording that were inaudible.

(xxx) a bracket with comments refers to individuals whose names I have excluded to preserve anonymity.

CHAPTER FOUR: MEETING THE FANS

Introduction

The previous chapter outlined how I have approached the collection and interpretation of 'data' from the fans who participated in this research. This chapter will discuss the process of meeting these fans and will consider how this process might be understood. The experience of meeting the fans in this research is in accord with the now well established 'snowballing' method (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Barker and Brooks, 1998; Hobson, 1989; Gray, 1992; Radway, 1982). This refers to the way that a key informant introduces the researcher to other informants who then put the researcher in touch with more informants and so on. It is generally accepted that this phenomenon is a result of fans knowing that their cultural interests are devalued or seen as problematic (Barker and Brooks, 1998; Bacon-Smith, 1992; Penley, 1991; Jenkins, 1992). Fans therefore are wary of researchers who may ridicule or pathologize them and central to this word-of-mouth circuit is the establishment of trust between the informant and the researcher. This chapter will demonstrate how this snowballing process and the establishment of trust took place in this research. It will be suggested, however, that the word-of-mouth recommendations that produce the snowballing effect are not only motivated by a desire to establish the trustworthiness of the researcher, although this is a significant part. I will argue that equally important (particularly in the case of official fan clubs and their personnel) is the existence of a hierarchy which restricts access to inner circles and fan club personnel. The existence of 'inner circles' in fandom has tended to be ignored or explained away in fan theory. As Chapter Two pointed out, theorists such as Bacon-Smith avoid the existence of this phenomenon through a questionable binary opposition between 'subversive' (female) fans and the fandom within masculinist culture. This is not to dispute that there are forms of fandom that are traditionally male dominated. However the distinctions that Bacon-Smith's female fans are making also exclude female fans and in fandoms primarily populated by females there are hierarchies that are not the result of male domination. Furthermore, as Jenkins as pointed out, media fandom in general has a predominantly female population, which for Jenkins partly explains what he considers to be the radical nature of fandom. However, this chapter introduces the concept of hierarchies in female vampire fandom and will argue that they are evident in the very procedures by which I was introduced to official fans. This chapter will attempt

to explain how this fan hierarchy operates a ‘reverse snowballing’ effect by drawing on Bourdieu’s analysis of the concept of ‘position-taking’ in the field of culture as outlined in Chapter Two. Bourdieu’s model is applied to vampire fan culture in greater detail in Chapter Nine in order to suggest an alternative theoretical approach to fandom which can explain both the active and vibrant interpretative practices of fan culture as well as the conflict and hierarchies to be found. Here I want to suggest that the conflicting modes of fandom and the ‘principle of heirarchization’ that Bourdieu identifies in the dominant values of culture can be seen to be at work even in the way that as a researcher I was introduced to individuals in vampire fandom.

Making contact

Writing to fan clubs did not prove to be a productive way to make contact with fans. In the winter of 1996 I wrote to six fan clubs or fanzine editors in Britain and wrote repeatedly to the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club in New Orleans. The only reply I received was from a merchandising company in Britain. I then placed an advert in the December 1996 issue of *The Darkside* magazine: Issue 63, followed by adverts in *Uri Geller’s Encounters* magazine in March and April 1997 in Britain.²³ In January of 1997 I also placed an advert in the New Orleans newspaper *The Times Picayune*. It was the responses that I had to these adverts (rather than contact with fan clubs) that initiated the snowballing process.

In Britain I received four initial replies to the advert in *The Darkside* from Dee, Pam, Eve and Lea. Lea put me in contact with Cheryl and I interviewed them together in Lea’s home in the north of England in February 1997. Pam put me in contact with Janet and I interviewed them together in March 1997 near Averbury Circle in the west of England. Eve put me into contact with a ‘vampire coven’ and I received six questionnaires from members of this group who did not, however, want to be interviewed. I interviewed Dee in her home in the north of England and she then gave my name and phone number to Jane whom I spoke to on the phone and who filled in a questionnaire. Jane then put me in contact with the London Vampire Group through whom I met Karen (who put me in contact with Jesse and I interviewed them together in Aylesbury in England) as well as George (whom I interviewed in London) and other fan club personnel. I attended four meetings of the LVG between February and August 1997. The adverts in *Uri Geller’s Encounters* produced a further 15 replies which I followed up through questionnaires and informal telephone conversations. It is probable

that these contacts would have led to further snowballing and interviews but it was not practical for me to handle a larger sample. I conducted eight face-to-face in-depth interviews, and three telephone interviews as well as having ten ‘chats’ over the telephone and received 29 questionnaires from women vampire fans in Britain. It is clear however, that my introduction to the fan club (as well as spiralling numbers of fans) was the result of a key contact considering me to be trustworthy and the word-of-mouth circuit that is generally understood to be ‘snowballing’.²⁴

In-depth, face-to-face interviews:

Dee: active member of British Vampire Society and other clubs.	Feb. 1997
Lea and Cheryl: inactive members of various clubs.	Feb. 1997
Pam and Janet: not club members.	April 1997
Karen and Jesse: active members of the London Vampire Group.	May 1997
George: London Vampire Group personnel.	June 1997

Telephone interviews:

Kay	May 1997
Jane	May 1997
Adele	June 1997

Similarly in New Orleans, it was responses to the *Times Picayune* advert that produced a key contact, Dana, rather than correspondence with the fan club. Dana and I exchanged 20 e-mails in the following two months and all of the subsequent contacts were made as a result of her interest in the project and the snowballing effect this had. Dana produced 500 ‘flyers’ containing the text of my original advert and posted them in a variety of appropriate venues in New Orleans. I received three e-mails from people who had seen Dana’s flyers, two from vampire fans who I subsequently discovered were unhappy with the ARVLFC. The first was from Shirin who produces the vampire fanzine, *The Realm of The Vampire*. After I had interviewed Shirin in New Orleans (again establishing my ‘trustworthiness’), she put me in contact with Melinda, a vampire fan, and a local tour guide. Melinda put me in contact with Hannah, whom she lives with. Linda and Hannah are both actively involved in the Internet newsgroup

Alt.books>Anne - Rice. They post vampire stories to the newsgroup and Hannah, a founding member, is the Keeper of the Archives of the newsgroup stories. The final e-mail came from a man who wanted to put me in touch with a female vampire fan Andrea, whom I contacted by phone when I arrived in New Orleans.

In-depth, recorded interviews:

Diane , bookstore fan	March 26, 1997
Adrian , disillusioned fan club member	March 27, 1997
Shirin , disillusioned ex-fan club member	March 28, 1997
Melinda , disillusioned ex-fan club member	March 29, 1997
Dana , non fan club member	March 30, 1997
Melinda and Hannah , disillusioned ex-fan club members	April 3, 1997

Interviews and discussions not recorded:

Ritchie , fan club vice president	March 28, 1997
Melanie , fan club ex-president	April 1, 1997
Sue , personal assistant to Rice	April 1, 1997
Max and Liz , book shop fans	April 3, 1997

My 'trustworthiness' was established on the basis of my own interest in the vampire fiction which I needed to be able to demonstrate through knowledge of the genre and also on the basis of being able to offer an acceptable account of the purpose of my research. It was only through my ability to demonstrate that I was not intending to ridicule or denigrate vampire enthusiasm that further contacts were offered.

Many feminists conducting research with women have discussed the importance of women interviewing women and the establishment of rapport (Griffiths, 1995; Griffin, 1980; Oakley, 1981; Finch 1984, Hobson, Gray). In the previous chapter I discussed some problematic issues to do with straightforward notions of empathy between women which underpins such an approach. However, it must be stressed that 'rapport' was a crucial element to establishing trust and at times a shared femininity played a part. This became particularly important, for instance, in the women's discussion of dress and their bodies. The fans were aware of our shared understanding of the pressures women face

about conforming to idealized notions of femininity. This recognition was a result of shared humour and common experiences and enabled the fans to be open and easy in their discussion of these issues. Yet rapport with the fans was primarily established by my ability to demonstrate that I shared their interest in vampire fiction and thus empathised with their enthusiasms rather than secretly ridiculing them.

Trust and rapport in New Orleans

In New Orleans I met five fans who discuss difficult experiences with the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club. Here too the establishment of rapport and trust was significant. For instance I met with one fan Melinda a couple of times before we taped our interview. During the interview Melinda told me about legal trouble she was having with the fan club, when the club successfully put a stop to ‘unofficial’ tours Melinda had been conducting. It was clear that she had been ‘checking me out’ before she decided to reveal these episodes (see chapter eight for a further discussion of Melinda’s experience of the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club). During these initial meetings Melinda spoke of her ‘roommate’ Hannah who later agreed to an interview. It was only after meeting with Melinda a further time and then meeting Hannah for an interview (which Melinda attended) that the couple explained that they were lovers. They were both relatively new to being openly lesbian and wanted a supportive atmosphere in which to give details of their romance (see Chapter Eight for a discussion of how Melinda and Hannah fell in love on the Internet). Thus establishing trust through conversation which established common reference points and mutual understanding (i.e. rapport) was an important factor in conducting interview research. The previous chapter discussed the implications of occasions with informants where mutual understanding was not established, such as fans with very racist views. Furthermore, I would like to suggest that there are times when a researcher can learn a great deal about the (sub) culture being studied without the establishment of rapport and mutual understanding.

The reverse ‘snowball’ effect

My introduction to the personnel of the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club was an instance when ‘rapport’ was not a necessary precondition to an insight into the fandom. The personnel of the fan club (whom I have called the ‘official fans’) did not require rapport, but instead wanted to ensure that I understood the rules of the fandom and the strict pecking order. I explain in Chapter Nine the position-taking that official fans

engage in, in order to establish a place in the hierarchy of this fan culture which results in an 'insider' status. I was accompanied by my friend Susie on my trip to New Orleans who agreed to help me conduct the fieldwork there. There was an assumption that Susie and I would also want to position ourselves as well regarded 'insiders' and what was revealed to us was that in order to do so we would have to accept the concomitant simultaneous position of usefulness to the object of fandom (Anne Rice) as well as accepting the fan hierarchy and a place within it. That the official fans are keen to preserve and make known the fan hierarchy can be explained though what I will term the reverse snowballing effect. The snowballing effect usually (as was discussed in the previous section) results in an exponential meeting of further fans. However, in the case of the official fan club Susie and I were gradually introduced to increasingly important and restricted fan club personnel. Through my initial contact with the book store fans I was introduced to the vice-president. The vice president of the fan club invited us to the final year art degree exhibition of Melanie, one of the four founding members of the fan club and an ex president²⁵. At this 'invitation only' event (about which circulated rumours of the possible attendance of Rice herself) I was introduced to another founding member and ex-president, turned full-time personal assistant to Rice, Sue. I was clear that it was only I as 'the researcher' who was being introduced to Sue, possibly by pre-arrangement with Sue. The vice president very formally introduced me and then led Susie and a small entourage of fans away, leaving Sue and me alone. This was the first and only time that Susie and I had been separated in this way and my initial thoughts were that such ceremonious behaviour seemed bizarre. However, Anne Rice is a very large fish in a smallish pond and there are real stakes involved in the position taking in this fandom as is explained in Chapter Nine. Sue operated very much as a PR official as well as holding out the potential 'insiderdom' valued by the official fans. For instance, at one point in our conversation, she explained that she and Anne would likely be travelling to England soon and asked what I knew about Stonehenge and other ancient sites²⁶. My reply about Avebury Stone Circle and the Callanish Standing Stones in Scotland was met with an indication that I may potentially meet Rice on the basis of being able to offer my services. I felt very much as if I were being granted an audience with Sue both because of her own demeanour and because of the authority she seemed to have over other fan club personnel. Towards the end of our meeting she actually clicked her fingers at the vice president (who had been keeping an eye in our direction throughout) and told him to give 'Milly and her assistant' a tour of St. Elizabeth's

Orphanage. We hadn't been asked if we wanted the tour, it was simply assumed that we would. The vice president was not being asked to help us but was being given an instruction from one with greater authority. The tour would have been very uncomfortable under these circumstances had Susie not managed to create a situation in which it would have appeared petty-minded not to include two less important club members who were desperate to see the inside of the orphanage (see Chapter Nine). Thus, the hierarchy in vampire fandom in New Orleans was a phenomenon we encountered not only through unofficial fan accounts and observation. We experienced this hierarchy in the manner that we were introduced (or not) to important figures (i.e. close to Rice) in the sub-field of vampire fandom, with the enticement that movement up this hierarchy provides access to Rice.²⁷ This mode of operating seemed to be so taken-for-granted among the official fans, that they did not consider how it might appear to an outsider. I had written to the fan club four times prior to travelling to New Orleans and received no reply but in the handling of my subsequent introduction to the hierarchy, the fan club seemed to be suggesting to me that it controlled access to the object of fandom. The official fans held important positions in the fandom and wanted to preserve those positions by ensuring that newcomers adopted a position in line with the official fan positions and that all positions were accorded legitimacy in this manner.

Conclusion

Conflicting attitudes towards what is important in fandom can be seen in the differing values that inform the ways that fans handle a researcher. The establishment of trust and mutual understanding (thus ensuring against misunderstanding and misrepresentation) are important to unofficial fans and the establishment and maintenance of a hierarchy can be seen to underpin at least one official fan club. Despite these differences, the women fans shared an active and often critical interpretation of vampire texts as well as sharing criteria for favourites. The following chapter will examine the female fans' interpretation of vampire fiction (which is so at odds with the academic interpretations of the vampire discussed in chapter one), to propose that the conventional male-centred approach to the vampire cannot account for a feminine interest in the figure. However, it will be suggested that the active interpretation of texts is not a non-contradictory subversion of interpretation (as is suggested by the Fiske/Jenkins approaches to fandom). The following chapters will offer a fuller picture of vampire fandom than is usually the case in studies of fandom which concentrate on fannish interpretations of texts and the

reworking of texts in their own writing (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Fiske, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1991). While these analyses of the creativity of fan culture offer useful insights into aspects of fan culture, they leave aside the question of the organization of the fandom. This study addresses not only fannish interpretations of the texts of fandom, but also examines both the practices of fandom (which includes but is not limited to rewriting the vampire) as well as the types of organizations found in the fan culture. This approach will attempt to demonstrate that active interpretation is a *single* aspect of fandom and does not on its own designate fandom as a resistant space, but *can* offer valuable reading pleasures to women whose experiences of subordination *may* find resonances in vampire fiction which in turn *may* result in the production of rebellious identities, depending on whether or not this contributes to or conflicts with other predispositions fans take with them into fandom or develop in the process of being a vampire fan.

CHAPTER FIVE: WOMEN READING THE VAMPIRE: GOTHIC MELODRAMA AND THE PLEASURES OF PATHOS

Introduction

This chapter begins an examination of women in vampire fandom. Each of the following chapters will examine a particular aspect of the women's fandom highlighting those instances when issues of gender are more salient than others. This examination begins with the women's interpretations of vampire fiction and will be based on the accounts offered by the British and American women fans of their sympathetic engagement with the vampire figure; their understanding about the meaning of the vampire and their preferences and dislikes within vampire fiction. It will be demonstrated that women fans do not adopt the masochistic viewing or reading positions that are said to be available to the female in the texts of *Dracula*, but it will also be argued that this is not because the fans read 'against the grain' or always significantly rework the raw material of the text (Jenkins, 1992: 63). Rather it is because the fans make choices from within the genre based on shared and coherent aesthetic criteria. It is not that the fans accept the 'preferred reading' of their favourites, but that they select them as favourites precisely because of their intended content.

In examining the accounts of women fans who read 'with the grain' of their favourites then, I have turned to academic discussions of textual meaning that address the features of vampire fiction highlighted by the women fans. Analyses of the literary gothic and its persistence in today's popular culture combine with feminist analyses of the pleasures of melodrama for women, in order to examine the fans' accounts of meaning and to consider what the 'new' sympathetic vampire fiction has to offer. This chapter will therefore begin with a discussion of how the fans read the vampire as a sympathetic figure of pathos and the way that this central criterion is deployed in their selection of favourites tales and characters from the body of vampire texts. This chapter will demonstrate the correlation between the descriptions that fans draw of their vampire favourites (as well as the profound dislike of many fans for *Dracula*) and theoretical discussions of the gothic and melodrama.²⁸ The relevance of the ideas of excess, pathos and empathy, of anxiety and uttering the unspeakable; ideas so central to the gothic and melodrama, offer insights about the fans discussion of the vampire in a manner that resonates with the fans' own understandings of their engagement. Theorists point to the

link between melodrama and the gothic, particularly in the conditions of their emergence and their history of development (Brooks, 1976; Punter, 1980). It will be argued that gothic and melodramatic themes persist in contemporary vampire fiction and continue to resonate with fans because, just as eighteenth century gothic writers raised un-askable questions about 'individualism and sexual separatism' (Punter, 1996: 200), contemporary Gothic is, as Punter puts it, 'still an arena for related questions' (200).

This chapter will then move on to examine the aesthetic complexity of the 'sympathetic' vampire fiction which dominates the fans' accounts of their reading pleasures. It will be argued that the traditional gothic moral universe in which innocence and evil were clearly demarcated, is complicated in contemporary gothic vampire fiction where the vampire is both victim and villain, and that this structuring is recognised and finds approval amongst the women fans. It is here that the aesthetic modes of melodrama combine with and compliment the gothic. For instance, the borrowing of serialization and emphasis on the personal/emotional can be found in the fans' choice of favourites and in their criteria for their preferences. In addition, the gothic deployment of history combines with 'verisimilitude' to provide contemporary and historical modes of 'believability'. To begin though, the pleasures of pathos.

Fan empathy and antipathy: the pleasures of pathos

At odds with much theorising about popular vampire fiction, female fans do not identify with the vampire's female victims, but rather, empathise with the vampire figure itself. But the vampire with whom the fans empathise has its ancestry in the early tradition of Gothic Romance rather than Dracula. The majority of the fans in both New Orleans and Britain are interested in those vampire narratives where the central vampire characters are constructed sympathetically. The difference between the women fans in the US and those in Britain has to do primarily with the vampire texts available when their interest in vampires was first aroused. For the American fans, this interest in the sympathetic vampire found early expression in vampire TV series such as *Dark Shadows* (ABC Television, 1966 - 1971) and *Forever Night* (CBS Television, 1992 - 1993) and only the few Dracula films from Universal Studios where the vampire is considered to be treated as persecuted and soulful. The central vampire characters in *Dark Shadows* and *Forever Night* are all at odds with their ontological status as vampires. Either trying to return to human form or using their vampiric powers to solve crime and help the innocent, these vampires are depicted sympathetically. The American fans when

discussing their early favourites comment enthusiastically about such portrayals. For example, Diane says of Barnabas Collins, the central vampire character in *Dark Shadows*:

I just absolutely loved him ... what attracted me — the vampire type that I like — is the romantic type ... you know he was a soulful creature, and he wasn't even very good looking, it was the romance of it (19).

Shirin makes a similar comment about her liking for *Forever Night*:

the vampires are towards slightly — they're human but they have this problem. They happen to be a vampire. Like in *Forever Night* you know. He's trying to become human again (192).

The American fans are unanimous in their preference for sympathetically portrayed vampires, and as the quotations above demonstrate, their interest in sympathetic vampires is accompanied by a demand for a version of 'romance'. Another example comes from Melinda who comments on the romance of the vampire thus:

romance not in the sense of a love interest, romance as in — this is something that stirs the passions of the soul [...] now I'll get on to the more base version of it later (laughs) (101 – 103)

Other American fans find sympathy in Frank Langella's 1979 version of *Dracula*, (Universal 1979) and they also speak in Gothic terms. For example Dana comments about the film:

oh, I liked that 1977 *Dracula* with Langella...I could watch it again and again, its just so filled with pathos, it's really dark Gothic - "oh, the night" (laughs) (97).

Melinda concurs:

Frank Langella [...] again, very similar. Now the *Dracula* version...it bothers me a bit, and even as a child I was rooting for the vampire, so the fact that he dies in the end just breaks my heart. It always does. [...] A beautiful creation that sympathetic, the pathos, and that's the best delivery of the 'Children of the Night' soliloquy I've ever heard. And all of a sudden you realise that this is not a monster, or if he is, then we all are. And again, he's just a lonely, lonely sad, beautiful creature. Again, I root for the monster. I can't help it (107).

The American fans then, refer overtly to an alternative vampire myth, one with the gothic roots of pathos and sympathy. Rather than the omnipotent menace of *Dracula*, the vampire popular today shares certain characteristics with the late eighteenth century fatal man, the Wanderer, found in various incarnations across European literature. The

Wanderer, according to Punter, involves the idea of a man who has committed a 'primal crime, but often in ignorance' (1996 vol. 2: 102). Punter suggests then that he is 'the victim of terrible persecution, one which he cannot alleviate' (102). This figure is 'doomed to a perpetual life on earth' and it is one that is 'never pleasant' (100). The seeds of sympathy with the 'mortal immortal' (102) can be found here and cross into early depictions of the vampire producing an amity between vampire and mortal. Even Polidori's Lord Ruthven (*The Vampyre*, 1819) transgresses social norms 'with the collaboration of his victims' (Punter, 1996: 103). Some decades later vampires like Le Fanu's *Carmilla* (*In a Glass Darkly*, 1872) haunts, but in a manner which is 'unmistakably part of [one's] own self' (202).

The appeal of a vampire who elicits sympathy in this 'dark' and 'pathos' filled way is shared by the majority of the women fans in Britain. However, while the American fans were watching television series and films vampire films from Universal Studios, British fans were watching late-night re-runs of the horror films from the Hammer Studio stable.²⁹ All of the British fans interviewed and spoken to in the course of this research had watched Hammer horror films on television either in their early teens or twenties and the majority comment with approval on those Hammer films where the vampire offers more than an image of menace.³⁰ Cheryl for example, comments that she favoured the Hammer films which drew on the *Carmilla* strand of the vampire idea (*Vampire Lovers*, 1970; *Lust For a Vampire* 1971). She explains why:

I like the mystery about it, and the sort of innocence about it. It's got sensuality about it, which again for the time would have been quite shocking, and she doesn't understand the feelings that she is having...you can empathise with her (78).

The empathy that Cheryl and the fans on both side of the Atlantic feel for the sympathetic vampire is matched by their articulation of disdain for Dracula. One British fan, Karen, comments that she initially considered the Christopher Lee vampire to have sympathy because he seemed 'torn'. With hindsight her judgement has altered:

Lee — the ways things progressed — how can I put it? He was good for his time, but he was very male chauvinistic, there was no equality and that was what I don't like about him, there's this vampire and it's all very male dominated. The females he made into vampire were cowering little things kept down in the cellar...where as with him it was control, um, and I will *not* be controlled (12).

Karen concludes that the Lee vampire was ‘very much a predator, there was nothing kind or gentle or sensuous about him. He really was just a killer you know’ (14). The importance placed on the vampire’s persecuted status, its feelings of being ‘torn’ and therefore the fans’ feelings of empathy are also voiced in their antipathy towards Dracula and other vampires who kill without conscience. Pam and Janet share Karen’s distaste for depiction of the vampires as indiscriminate killers. In an exchange they explain why they dislike most of the Hammer films:

Pam: Those ones just show that they’re hunters and killers and they kill, kill, kill indiscriminately and they just always seem to portray is as evil and bad and the church and the crosses and the garlic -

Janet: That’s ‘cause the church were always hunting them down, weren’t they? Hunters with their stakes going after them ‘cause they don’t understand them -

Pam: Yeah, the vicars are always up there with them (both laugh) (599 – 601).

These fans hate Dracula for the very reasons critics offer for the success of this figure. The pleasure, critics claim, is afforded the reader through the hunt and destruction of Dracula (Astle, 1980; Bentley, 1988; Pirie, 1977; Richardson, 1959; Skal, 1993, 1996; Twitchell, 1985; Zanger, 1997). Yet this is a cause for disdain by these fans. The American fans concur. Melinda comments that the Dracula legend ‘bothers me a bit and even as a child I always root for the monster, so the fact that he dies at the end breaks my heart, always does’. The disappointment at the vampire’s destruction combines with a disapproval of the depiction of vampirism in ‘Dracularized’ modes. Thus there is a unanimous distaste for Stoker’s novel *Dracula* (1897). Melinda says of the book:

I never could actually sit through the book, because the book was always of...he is a monster, he is walking like a lizard, he turns himself into a bat, he is a grotesque creature, [...] I was only eleven when I saw that version of the movie, or twelve. Back in this very impressionable age, and I just decided that is the version that I wanted to cling to and when I tried to go back and read that *Dracula* again before I realised how much of a difference there generally is between the book and the movie. I was horrified, and so I never actually made it through, I just couldn’t (115).

Andrea also could not ‘sit’ through the book because Dracula is:

just mean and nasty, so I don’t like the ones with all the gore and I really don’t think that that’s a true portrait. That’s not really what a vampire is like (25).

Hannah similarly describes reading *Dracula* recently:

I hated it, it was not everything I liked in Anne Rice...I just didn't like the way the character was portrayed, they were too interested in making him a villain, I didn't like it...[Rice's vampires] they were anti-villains, or the sympathetic sort of villain at least that you could get into even if they were killers and what not. You could at least have sympathy for them, they were not there just to be despised (70).

Shirin, too, is 'not a big Christopher Lee fan' but she demonstrates a knowledge of the transformations of Dracula from page to screen which echo Gelder's comments about the 'cultural "remodelling"' (1994, 92) of Dracula and she identifies the 'vein of sympathy' (1980: 348) for the screen vampire that Punter refers to but which many critics have ignored:

Frankenstein is a better book than *Dracula*, but the *Dracula* movies are better. I don't think the *Frankenstein* movies are so good. He's just a monster and he's not like that in the book. But *Dracula* you see, he *is* like that in the book, but it seems like they got it all turned around in the movies (276).³¹

Here Shirin's criteria for 'better' monster tales resides in their depiction as something more than 'just a monster'. Diane's comment about *Dracula* the book and *Dracula* in the movies repeat those of Shirin. She states:

I loved the later *Dracula* movies, especially the most recent one with Gary Oldman ... *Dracula* the book, you hated *Dracula*, *he was a monster and you wanted him to die*. But the movies are so, the 1977 one I can watch again and again, it's so romantic — I just love it (80) [my italics].

Thus, Gelder's discussion about the cultural transformations of the vampire illuminate the fans discussion about the vampire and their selection criteria within it. Gelder argues that rather than being 'dependent upon the "original" novel', these films 'establish their own "look"[...] which [...] stands as a constant point of reference [...] both in those films and beyond them' (92) (see Chapter One for a fuller discussion). There is a sense that the depiction of the vampire has moved on and developed. Like Diane, Pam and Janet in Britain praise Gary Oldman as *Dracula* because of the pathos of his circumstances:

Janet: It was another sad story wasn't it, looking through the centuries and trying to find his -

Pam: Elizabeth -

Janet: And getting obsessed with finding his lost love and when he sees that picture of her that's another one -

Pam: That was also very good because that again went away from the normal sort of angle didn't it -

Janet: Yeah well look at how emotional he was -

Pam: Yeah, no. He wasn't just an evil, he was so emotional he loved her with such a passion [...]

Janet: And that carried him through the centuries -

Pam: All the centuries just waiting for her to come back waiting and waiting and waiting. Well I hope Winona Ryder is not at the end of it (649 – 661).

The central criteria that the women fans employ in their vampire preferences is that the vampire be constructed sympathetically, as a romantic figure of pathos. A noticeable difference between the fan favourites in the US and those in Britain centres on the film *The Lost Boys* (Warner Bros., 1987). This film is not mentioned in the accounts coming from the American fans, but many of the British fans count it among their favourites. In this case the criteria of sympathetic portrayal is joined by a relish for the rebelliousness of the vampire gang depicted in the film. One British fan, Dee, explains her delight in this film which she says she has watched repeatedly:

I really love that film, not so much the story — I really love the vampires in it. It was the whole idea of their gang and where they lived and trying to get the Michael character to join and that. The Michael character was my favourite 'cause he didn't want to kill and that. But then I really didn't want them to live happily ever after. I wanted him to be a vampire and for it to just go on (392).

Pam and Janet make similar comments

Janet: *The Lost Boys* were good in a different sort of way, 'cause there were rebels -

Pam: They were total rebels, they knew what they had and they just got on with it. They did flaunt it a bit, they were just rebellious. Michael was my favourite -

Janet: He pulls back from it, which was a pity. I liked all the others, yeah the bad boys, yeah, they were good (812 – 814).

The fans' comments about the attractions of the rebelliousness of the gang echo Gelder's comments about the films' alluring depiction of youth culture as 'fun' and 'trouble' (104) and the 'lawlessness' of the vampire gang (103). But, while the women in Britain favour Michael's sympathetic depiction, the engagement with this character does not flow through to the film's conclusion. Gelder suggests that the audience are being instructed in proper masculine behaviour (heterosexuality and heading complete families), but it is a lesson that cannot compete with the glamour of the rebel. The women fans do not want Michael's family to 'live happily ever after', instead they want him to become a vampire (so long as he does not simply 'kill, kill, kill') and for it 'just to go on'. As well as demonstrating a fascination with figures of rebellion, the fans'

response to this film seems to indicate that engagement and sympathy with a character does not lead to compulsive identification. Instead they judge the fiction on the basis of pre-existing criteria. The criterion for excellence for the fans involves the central character remaining a vampire against its will and when the film does not meet the criterion, it is found lacking.

There is, however, a collection of vampire tales which do meet this criteria and they are firm favourites among the British and American fans alike. These stories are *The Vampire Chronicles* (1976, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1995, 1998, 1999) written by Anne Rice. These *Chronicles* have been very popular, blockbuster novels. For instance, the first tale, *Interview With The Vampire* (1976) was a best seller and has remained in print in both paper back and hardback (Melton, 1994: 511). The book was also made into a film starring Tom Cruise in 1995 (*Interview With the Vampire*, Warner Bros.). It is in *The Vampire Chronicles* that the majority of the fans find that all of the criteria have been met for a successful vampire story. The majority of the fans in Britain and New Orleans have an intense attachment to the vampires of Rice's creation and speak about them at length. This is not surprising coming from the fans in New Orleans, all of whom I met through their connection in one way or another with the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club (ARVLFC) situated in that city. However, the similarities between the accounts offered by fans in New Orleans and those in various parts of Britain are striking. The following section will examine these fan favourites because not only do they demonstrate most fully what vampirism means to the fans, they also provide the basis for much of the fans accounts of their personal relationship to the vampire idea. Furthermore, these tales provide the basis of much of the activities of fandom that will be discussed in chapters Seven and Eight.

The 'Vampire Chronicles': fan favourites

The Vampire Chronicles are an ever growing serial of first person narratives told from the point of view of one of the central vampires. The first, *Interview With The Vampire* (1976), is Louis' story, but the following four are told to us by Lestat 'the brat prince' vampire, and involve his predicament and his adventures. The use of first person narration from the point of view of the vampire is a development for the genre where the human narrative point of view has traditionally positioned the vampire as 'other' to the human protagonists. The result is that the vampires, rather than signifying a fear of the

dangerous and taboo, are presented as sympathetic and knowable ‘outsiders’. As each vampire recounts the story of their entry into the world of vampirism, tales of oppression unfold with the vampires having vampirism unwillingly thrust upon them. Louis, like the eighteenth century Wanderer, has unwittingly committed the crime of disbelief. So, for instance, just as Smollett’s Don Diego the Castilian (*The Adventures of Ferdinand Count Fathom*, 1753) believes he has murdered his wife and daughter, Louis believes himself responsible for his brother’s death because his own lapsed faith had made it impossible to accept that his brother was a saint. It is the resulting guilt and self loathing (which sets Louis apart from his world) that first brings him to the attention of Lestat, who performs the act which forces Louis’ vampiric transformation. Thus because of his lack of religious faith and his guilt Louis is doomed to roam the earth forever, like the Wanderers of gothic fiction. But Louis is innocent, (he is not responsible for his brother’s death and did not invite vampirism) and the persecution he suffers is that of one caught tragically in circumstances outside of his control. So too Lestat, the reader discovers in the second *Chronicle*, who was yanked off the streets of Paris (after fleeing a tyrannical father) by a powerful vampire drawn to Lestat’s beauty and strength. The vampire enacts the change on Lestat and then perishes, leaving Lestat as a fledgeling vampire with no understanding of what has happened to him. Furthermore, Rice’s vampires share as much with the *heroine* of the Gothic novel as its villain. The melodramatic structuring of the heroine, which Gledhill describes as ‘objects of pathos [...] constructed as victims of forces that lie beyond their control and understanding’ (1987: 30) is a description that could be applied to Rice’s vampires. Thus, Rice has rewritten the vampire, combining character elements from the ‘villain’, the Wanderer and fatal man with those of the persecuted melodramatic heroine of classic Gothic novels.

The vampires’ unwanted plight and persecuted innocence are aspects of the *Chronicles*’ melodramatic structuring that finds favour with the women fans. Many of the women comment that the sympathy with Louis and Lestat derives from the knowledge that they did not choose to become a vampire but had it thrust upon them. For example, Diane says:

with Lestat and Louis, it’s against their will and so long as those conditions are met, it’s okay, you know? I don’t like it when they start liking what they’re doing or if they become a vampire because they like killing or they like blood, you know? [...] I like the “can’t help it”, you know, “got into this by accident but

soldiers on”, you know? That’s what attracts me and it seems as long as those conditions are met I can be sympathetic (24 – 26).

Shirin also ‘likes the more thoughtful ones’ and Andrea comments that she is a fan because ‘there are characters that you can care about, in comparison to some of the other vampires that are just sadistic and like hurting people’. In Britain, Cheryl favours Louis because of the pathos of his circumstances:

I like the way that he is really unhappy with his existence. I like that he’s not happy with himself and that he’s got to kill people (76).

Janet and Pam concur:

Janet: I think Anne Rice’s books have woken a lot of people up to the concept of vampires. It makes them seem as if they’re not so different from us, they’re not monsters, they’re not ghouls -

Pam: They’re just different ...

Janet: That’s why I like the way that someone eventually portrayed them finally as very loving people, not monsters. They are very loving, they have got deep feelings, they’ve made them seem, you know, not the old Nostradamus and all the old monsters ... vampires that were terrifying and, and with the fingernails and

Pam: Yeah, it’s all Hollywood.

Janet: I mean these were beautiful people and they got such intense passion and feelings for life (148 – 152).

The fans’ comments about their favourites demonstrate the importance of the construction of the vampire characters through melodramatic modes of pathos and sympathy. Feminists have suggested that melodrama has the ability to force to the surface what are often submerged injustices, through the portrayal of a misunderstood and wrongly damned protagonist, and that this portrayal often resonates with women’s experiences (Gledhill, 1987; Kilgour, 1995; Miles, 1994; Moers, 1977; Williams, A., 1994; Williams, L., 1987). Gledhill, for example, argues that melodrama is a ‘public enactment of socially unacknowledged states’ (1987: 31). The pleasure that the fans take in sympathising and relating to their favoured vampires follows this melodramatic structuring. This is evidenced in the many comments about the ‘pathos’ of the vampires and their ‘soulful’ existence; the designation of the vampires as victims of forces outside of their control and the desire for their innocence to be recognised; ‘finally someone has portrayed them [...] not [as] monsters’. It is important that the vampire is ‘not so different from us’.

Melodramatic depiction of persecuted innocence gives voice to incomprehensible wrongs and offers the pleasures of recognition. It is here that the links between the

gothic and melodrama are seen to be strongest. Both are to do with persecuted innocence and the unspeakable. Indeed, Brooks argues that '[m]elodrama shares many characteristics with the Gothic novel' (1976: 18). As in melodrama, the gothic images for the modern imagination the realm of the ethical by 'insisting that behind reality, hidden by it yet indicated within it, there is a realm where large moral forces are operative, where large choices of ways of being must be made' (21). This explains the 'frenzy of the Gothic, the thunder of its rhetoric, and the excess of its situations' (19). Similarly, Gledhill argues that melodrama offers 'significance unavailable within the constraints of socially legitimated discourse' and because of this it must invest in 'highly symbolised personages, events and relations' (37). It is hard to imagine a more poignant symbol of outsiderdom than the vampire and, because Rice's vampires have outsiderdom forced upon them, a more potent image of pathos.

But the vampires in the *Chronicles* differ from usual melodramatic character construction because they complicate the categorisation of good and evil. In melodrama 'innocence and villainy construct each other: innocence defines the boundaries of the forbidden which the villain breaks' (Gledhill, 1987: 21). Brooks concurs that:

melodramatic good and evil are highly personalised [...] Most notably evil is villainy; it is a swarthy, cape-enveloped man with a deep voice. Good and evil can be named as persons are named - and melodramas tend in fact to move towards a clear nomination of the moral universe (17).

This structure is absent from the sympathetic vampire fiction of the late twentieth century. Rice's vampires represent a duality; victims of circumstances but intervening in those circumstances; innocent, but not entirely; outcasts rather than evil. These tales, while drawing on melodrama, do not simply re-enact its Manichaeian struggle through individual characters. There is no simple categorisation of good and evil and no 'confrontation of clearly identified antagonists and the expulsion of one of them' (Brooks: 1976: 17). Brooks' analysis of melodrama (which the gothic deploys) as an urge to personalise morality does persist in the modern vampire tales, but it is not preoccupied with the menace of evil. Instead, these tales focus more on the melodramatic drive to significance and meaning and, just as in the arena of morality, it can only be conceived in personal terms. In a sense, in melodrama, the question of significance *becomes* a personal and moral question. Brooks comments on melodrama's 'attention to the significant in life' (22) with heroes and heroines who must 'be so sensitized an instrument, one upon whom everything leaves a mark, with whom

everything sets up a correspondence, is not simply an observer of life's surface, but someone who must bring into evidence, even into being, life's moral substance' (23). The fact that Louis 'doesn't like', and refuses what he has to do (drink human blood) is a constant moral reference point for the other vampires in the series. There is a further sense to the quest for significance, however, and this has very much to do with personal and individual meaning. For Louis, it is his search for others of his kind and for the meaning of his new existence (his personal significance in the scheme of things) that motivates his journey from the New World to the Old and instigates his adventures. He avenges the destruction of Claudia the child vampire at the hands of the Parisian troupe of vampires, with a power that demonstrates he is a force to be reckoned with. Yet he returns to the New World without any answers and this propels him into a state of endless melancholy. For some fans, like Cheryl, that he is 'not happy with his existence' but nevertheless continues on, is a key aspect of his attraction as a character. Furthermore, the final exchange quoted above (between Pam and Janet) demonstrates not only that it is important that the vampires are recognised as 'not monsters', but also that they express 'intense' emotional states such as 'passion' and 'feelings for life'. It is important that the vampires Louis and Lestat are not simply victims of circumstances, but that unlike the gothic heroine of old, they also have preternatural powers with which to intervene in those circumstances and to live fully. For Rice's characters vampirism is agony, but it is also, as Punter puts it, 'rich, glowing and lustrous [...] which is open to the vampire's vastly expanded senses' (1996, 161). So while Louis' appeal is primarily his embodiment of an anguished morality, Lestat is a rule breaker. As Melinda puts it, 'Louis is sorrow and Lestat is glamour'. Thus, for many fans, Lestat is the favoured vampire. If Louis is a sensitive one on whom everything leaves a mark, Lestat is one who leaves his mark on everything. Like Louis, he also desires personal significance and meaning in the world, but this propels him into ever more shocking escapades. Lestat moves from being a vampire rock star to stealing a human body to inhabit, to re-animating the terrible original Egyptian goddess-vampire and finally is wooed by a quasi-Miltonian version of the devil that he follows into hell. His power and zest for adventure combine with the sympathy produced by the pathos of his circumstances. Many fans find this mixture most appealing. Dee, for example, explains why she favours Lestat:

Oh I loved *The Vampire Lestat*. I actually loved it better than the first one. I don't know, he's had a rough time, but he just gets on with it (12).

Melinda offers a full and lucid account of why *The Vampire Lestat* (1985) is her favourite *Chronicle*:

It goes into the creation of Lestat and how and what he went through. Again, we've got the emotions, we've got the pathos. He's a normal kid, he was abused, he ran away. He's doing well for himself, he's not doing bad, I mean he's doing what I'm doing here, right? Just eking out a living, but he's happy. Suddenly he gets snatched off the streets and vamped! Woah! You know, how did he deal with it? How did he rise above it? And this happened to so many others. Louis got snatched off the streets and vamped. But what did he do? He spiralled down. Lestat spiralled up - he overcame - he conquered. Yes! Go baby! Um, so I admire the book because it delves deep into the heart of what every human is capable of and watches them rise above everything...no matter how fantastic (167).

Melinda takes great pleasure in Lestat's ability to 'rise above', thus demonstrating that as innocent victims of circumstances, it is important that the vampires do not succumb to that victimisation. Lestat, rather than succumb, uses his predicament to enlarge his experience, showing strength and determination. The fans who favour Louis also find a strength in his character, missing from Lestat. Cheryl and Pam in Britain and Andrea in New Orleans all comment that Louis is 'more of a thinker' than Lestat. They also comment that he has never 'gone underground' in the way Lestat has. This refers to the practice that Lestat and other vampires have of going into a kind of vampiric hibernation underground when the endlessness of their existence becomes too much to bear. But Louis' strength is that he has endlessly been able to bear the unbearable and many fans find this trait appealing.

However, the fans do not simply 'identify' with the vampires uncritically. The fans' reading practices and the serialised structure of the *Chronicles* themselves produce a reflexive approach to the vampire favourites. It will be proposed in the following section (drawing on feminist theories of the melodramatic structuring of soap opera) that the emotional proximity fans may have to their favoured vampires is combined with another mode of engagement not generally associated with popular fiction or the fan; critical distance. Based on the critical comments the fans make about various aspects of the *Chronicles* and the way that the fans stand back from their favoured characters and

chastise them, it will be argued that this reading process cannot be understood through traditional accounts of identification.

Serialization: emotional proximity and critical distance

Unlike traditional vampire tales, where the narrative drive to destroy the evil vampire represents ‘a social order to be purged, [and] a set of ethical imperatives to be made clear’ (Brooks, 1976:17), the fans’ favoured vampire tales move towards serialization with its in-built inability to sustain a singular point of view. *Dark Shadow* and *Forever Knight* were reasonably long running television serials, while the ever-growing *Vampire Chronicles* series have protagonists ceaselessly commenting on the stories told by their vampire peers. The fans take considerable pleasure in the serialised format of the *Chronicles*. Hannah in New Orleans explains very clearly the appeal:

You asked me if I like Poppy Brite and I said not as much as Anne Rice and part of the reason why - it’s a single book - I pick it up, I read it, I put it down and I’m never gonna read anything with these same characters in it again, because she doesn’t write a series, she writes a book (47).

Many feminists have commented on the pleasures of serialization for women in the context of soap opera (Ang, 1982; Brunsdon, 1981; Brown, 1990; Geraghty, 1991; Hobson, 1982; Jordan, 1981; Modleski, 1982; Williams, 1987). The insights about the relationship between textual structuring and reading pleasures from this body of work cast a revealing light on the comments of the vampire fans. This is a structure which, in producing multiple perspectives from which to view each character to fuel story lines, makes it difficult to support a permanent reading of any character as good or evil. Linking soap opera and vampire fiction may be unconventional, but just as the new ‘sympathetic vampire fiction’ deploys the structures of melodrama, the fiction also borrows from women’s genres the conventions of serialization. The previous section demonstrated the fans’ investment in the idea that the vampire is (finally) understood. But there are other aspects of the vampires’ ‘knowability’ which appeal to the fans and which are similar to the construction of soap opera characters. This stems from the shared longevity and regularity of engagement with characters. As in soap opera, the serial structure of the fans’ favourite vampire fiction gives them the opportunity to engage with the vampire characters in a continuous manner. Feminists have discussed the importance of this continuity as well as the range of characters available for fans to

engage with. Williams, for example, argues that the ‘very form of soap opera encourages identification with multiple points of view. At one moment, the female viewers identify with a woman united with her lover, at the next with the sufferings of her rival’ (1987: 315). Thus the viewer finds engagements and sympathy across a range of characters whose positions are often at odds with each other. This type of engagement is important because it is a diffuse process where viewers can be torn between a number of characters. As Geraghty argues, ‘in soap opera identification is decentred; it is invited across a range of characters [...] it is thus possible for regular viewers to be torn between two characters’ (1991: 17). Both Brunsdon and Geraghty argue that this structuring provides a central mechanism for the pleasure of viewing. Brunsdon comments, ‘[a] range of different opinions and understandings of any one situation will thus be voiced’ and that along with the postponement of dénouement, this ‘invites the viewer to engage in [...] speculation and judgement [...] [and] practice possible outcomes’ (1997: 16). Similarly, Geraghty argues that ‘[s]oaps offer a continually shifting kaleidoscope of emotional relationships which allow the audience to test out how particular emotional variations can or should be handled’ (41). Likewise, *The Vampire Chronicles* have a variety of characters, vampire and human, whose conflicting narrative positions the fans simultaneously engage with and judge. For example Diane comments:

Well, when I first read the books Louis was my favourite and I thought Lestat was a terrible, terrible, guy. But then in the next book...you just wanted to say “Louis - get a life”, you know what I mean? And then after a while you realise that Lestat isn’t as big as he thinks he is. I mean in *The Queen of The Damned* he really bit off more than he could chew [...] those women were really powerful (76).

This fan both sympathises with the vampires and criticises their behaviour. Melinda and Hannah also comment on their ‘soft spot’ for Louis even though ‘he’s a bit of a whiner’. Similarly, despite Lestat’s ‘devil-may-care’ attitude and his courage in rule breaking, they find him ‘a bit of a spoilt brat - the brat prince’. Thus the fans’ engagements with the characters across a range of texts and period of time means that they have sympathy and engagements across a number of subject positions and make judgements and re-evaluations when positions are at odds with each other. For Geraghty it is important to emphasise the audience’s ability to judge in this way because it replaces the ‘model of the tolerant viewer accepting everything with [...] [that of] the competent viewer

weighing the emotional dilemmas put before her' (47). Pam and Janet demonstrate this fully in their discussion of Lestat:

Janet: Even he got fed up though. He buried himself down because he couldn't hack it anymore, even with all his knowledge and everything.

Pam: And then Lestat, he wanted to be human again and that's why this body thief tapped into him 'cause that's what he desperately wanted -

Janet: And then he didn't like it, did he?

Pam: No. Never satisfied is he? (762 – 766)

Later on in the interview, their discussion of Lestat's reckless behaviour chimes with Diane's comments above. They say:

Pam: Even Lestat couldn't handle that one from Egypt -

Janet: The first one. Even he couldn't handle her.

Pam: He bit off more than he could chew, didn't he? (786 – 788)

Clearly then, the fans' sympathy for the vampires does not stop a critical stance towards them. Feminist scholarship has identified this twofold approach to fictional engagements, at once undermining the idea of women as passive consumers as well as underlining how certain textual forms lend themselves to these reading processes. This approach is significantly different to fan theory's emphasis on textual poaching because it has not abandoned a consideration of the *textual* processes that engage particular audiences. Furthermore, the idea of 'testing out' positions is a valuable insight about the processes of viewing and reading and this idea will be pursued in the following chapter which examines how the fans relate the vampire to the 'self'.

However, it is not only serialization that contributes to the simultaneous modes of critical distance and emotional proximity. Geraghty, for instance, argues that it is also the blending of different aesthetic modes in soaps that produces a shifting point of view and varying subject positions. Geraghty identifies the combined aesthetics of light entertainment, realism and melodrama in soap opera, arguing that the tensions between these varied traditions facilitates critical distance. She argues, '[t]his shifting between the different traditions contributes to the experience of engagement and distance which is so characteristic of soap viewing' (36). The new sympathetic vampire fiction also combines aesthetic traditions. Gothic horror is combined with melodrama and serialization. There is also a further mode in operation within these new vampire tales which the fans describe with phrases such as 'the realm of the normal', and which may be described as 'verisimilitude' (Gledhill, 1987) and 'emotional realism' (Ang, 1982).

Fan attachments to this mode will be discussed below. What is suggested here though is that, as in soap opera, a mix of aesthetic traditions is found in the vampire fiction favoured by the women fans, offering the combined reading pleasures of close sympathetic engagement with the characters and critical distance. This alternative way of making sense of women fans' engagement with the vampires of Rice's *Chronicles* begins to problematise the accounts of identification found in the critical discussion of *The Vampire Chronicles* where fans are considered to be 'greedily ingesting' (Hodges and Doane, 1991: 158) Rice's pre-oedipal versions of postfeminism or 'getting carried away' to the extent that they become 'pacified' and 'converted' (Gelder, 1994: 112) by the novels' ability to collapse 'the boundaries...[of] critical distance' (112). However, there is no compulsory divide between different types of engagement, as feminist scholarship of soap opera has demonstrated; intense empathy with a character is joined by character assassination and the fans are quite aware of the formal properties that are, according to Hodges and Doane (and others), manipulating them.

Vampires and verisimilitude: "knowing" the vampire and the pleasures of "playing the game"

Vampire fans share another mode of engagement with soap opera fans. The fans verbalise the feeling of knowing the characters well and a desire to believe that the characters are real. This may be another feature of serialization found both in soap opera and the vampire fan favourites. Hobson comments on this in relation to the soap audience. She argues that the 'audience tends to think they "know" the characters even though they do not actually have personal acquaintance with the performer. This seems to be particularly prevalent in long-running series' (1982: 87). For soap fans this is involves the 'complete fusing of the two identities' (87) of actor and character. The vampire fans are also adamant about their knowledge and understanding of the characters, to the extent that some claim to know them better than Rice herself. Melinda explains:

[s]ee - Anne does just enough research to really screw it up, she is shoddy in her research [...] does she know what Louis' middle name is? No, but I do (1).

In this case, an intense emotional attachment to the character is linked to a critical stance towards the author. This sense that the character belongs to the fan rather than the author has been noted by other studies of fandom (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992). Thus

rather than intense engagements defusing critical approaches to the fiction, it seems to enhance them. This is demonstrated when Karen explains why she dislikes *Memnoch The Devil*, the fifth of the *Vampire Chronicles*:

I don't like it at all 'cause she killed off my favourite character, but in a way ... the way she killed him off didn't fit in with the character she had built up in the rest of the books. I could understand him wanting to evolve and seeing what was on the other side, but the way she did it, she like totally turned everything around. It was like she was trying to rip her characters to pieces, to degrade them, to demoralise them, um, make people hate them the way she sort of made people associate or like them, you know? And that I couldn't understand. Her writing technique changed and it really wasn't for the better (82).

Karen's deep attachment to particular vampire characters does not stunt her critical faculties. Instead, she employs well thought out and cogent criteria towards the fiction and, like other fans, is acutely aware of lapses. Karen objects, not that her favourite character was killed off (although she isn't well pleased by this), but the lack of consistency in character construction and verisimilitude in depictions of events. Rather than Karen being manipulated by Rice's ability to write vampires that one can associate with, she understands it as a technique and demands it as part of the criteria which made the *Chronicles* favourites in the first place. The scene Karen is referring to at the end of *Memnoch*, finds the vampire Armand throwing himself into the flames and perishing after a last minute religious conversion. Many fans are critical of *Memnoch* because of its inconsistent portrayal of Armand. But fans of the popular media are often accused of becoming so attached to characters they cannot distinguish between the fiction and reality (cf. Jensen, 1992). This has been particularly the case for soap opera fans (but not exclusively). In an interview with an actor from the now axed British soap opera, *Crossroads*, Hobson discusses this issue (1982). The actor suggested that the "mass of people regard them not as actors but regard them as characters" (102). Hobson puts forward that it is actually a minority of viewers who believe that the characters are real, but of those who do she does not 'pretend to fully understand' them (101). There are also vampire fans who seem to believe in the reality of Rice's characters. This is demonstrated in the following exchange between Pam and Janet:

Pam: It's just the way she's portrayed everything, it's like she has an inside knowledge. You can almost imagine her having someone like Lestat or Louis sat there. It's like the stories she's

writing are real, you know - it's not just something she made up, it's almost -

Janet: Yeah, for me it's hard to see that it's a story. To me I can see that they are real people and they really did exist and they are probably still out there now and I know that may sound silly but it is the way I see it (156 – 157).

Hobson suggests that the 'blurring of reality and fiction in the minds of the minority of viewers' (104) of *Crossroads* may be at least partly a result of the effort the production team puts into the 'mixing [...] fiction and reality in the characters who appear on screen' (104). That actor's personal traits are incorporated into the screen character cannot explain the reaction of Pam and Janet to the fictional vampires of the *Chronicles*³² because there are no stars with whom to confuse them. The first three *Chronicles* were published long before the film *Interview* was produced and the reaction to the casting of Tom Cruise to play Lestat in the film was one of general dismay; the actor seemed to lack the personal characteristics necessary to successfully play Lestat. Thus the idea of merging star with character cannot explain Pam and Janet's reaction to the *Chronicles* (although, in reverse, it explains their reaction to the subsequent film). Instead, Hobson's suggestion that the fans may be 'joining in a game [...] know[ing] that they are doing it' (104), seems more plausible (although Hobson is reluctant to say this for certain). Bourdieu's account of why popular or working class audiences may 'join in a game' in this manner is valuable despite his suggestion that such audiences may only have a singular mode of engagement. For Bourdieu, because access to cultural capital is restricted by those with positions at the autonomous pole of dominance in the field (see Chapter Two), those who are refused access deploy what Bourdieu calls a deliberate naiveté, a willingness to suspend disbelief in a demand for participation. This sense of deliberation seems crucial. For rather than implying that working class (popular) audiences are in some way duped, this formulation suggests that they allow themselves to be carried away in order to refuse being refused access to cultural experiences which, as one fan puts it, 'stir the soul'. That Pam can *almost* imagine Louis or Lestat sitting next to Rice and dictating their story to her; that Janet opines that they *probably* exist, seems to suggest a deliberate naiveté, that Pam and Janet *want* to participate in the fiction and be carried away by it - they *want* to believe it is real, even if it cannot be. However, while Pam and Janet's response to the fiction seems to fit Bourdieu's analysis of working class participation, other fans express the desire for the fiction to be

believable in the more conventional language of 'realism', and the pleasure verisimilitude affords. Dee for example puts it very clearly:

you *do* know that vampires are made up? But I would like to believe it's real [...] I really loved *The Vampire Lestat* because it's set in a modern day context when he's in a rock band and that (247).

Lea makes a similar point:

I could associate more with *The Vampire Lestat*. It's sort of to do with living so many years and bringing it up to these days and being in a rock band. It's really up-to-date. I can relate to it more because in the past you have to imagine it. But you can really believe that what's happening to Lestat is *really* happening (120).

Andrea echoes this with a view that 'it shows them living an everyday life...it's a lot more plausible'. Melinda explains the combined pleasures of romance verisimilitude in some detail:

it puts what would be considered a very fantastic episode into the realms of the normal. And suddenly instead of being Count Dracula, it's Lestat the street urchin off the Paris streets [...] is it the vampire or the Gothic applied to my society? I love these people and I love the history she's given me. I love the vision she's given me of what should be very normal. I love New Orleans because she showed it to me in a completely new way - like *Rue Royale* - I don't walk down Royal Street, I walk down *Rue Royale* (Hannah's tape: 334).

The demand for the fiction to be 'up-to-date' rests on the desire for the stories to be believable and this is one of the achievements of *The Vampire Chronicles*. Five years before *Interview* was published, film critics were predicting the demise of horror (Pirie, 1977; Tudor, 1974). For example, Tudor finds the genre 'very limited' (207) and this is partly to do with its gothic origins. He writes, 'In this world, clearly borrowed in part from the Gothic novel, we find Lord and peasant, castle and village, forest and mountain. In short, Transylvania' (207) and he comments, '[s]eldom has a genre been wrung so dry' (205). What these critics did not foresee was the genre's ability to mutate into a selection of sub-genres (slasher, vampire, alien, etc.) set in the landscapes of modern America.

But the gothic legacy persists with great force in the vampire sub-genre with the result that its appeal to history carries as much weight as the present day context. This does not, however, limit the genre and its transformation. Rice's novels have successfully traversed the distance between past and present because her vampires have persisted

from Old World to New, although they are creatures of neither world. The narratives are present day recounting from a vampire, of events from as long ago as antiquity to as recent as yesterday. How that past is imagined is an important element of the fans' interest in the tales, because of the fans' desire for believability. The following section will examine the *Chronicles*' gothic rewriting of history to make the unbelievable, believable and the fans' accounts of their interest in this aspect of the tales.

The gothic as a mode of history

The past in *The Vampire Chronicles* is evoked from what Punter describes as a 'liminal' vantage point where Louis, for one, is caught between 'immersion in history and suspension above it'. This disconnection Punter suggests, is Rice re-viewing the vampire 'through Walter Benjamin' (1996: 162). He writes, 'here Paris is certainly "the capital of the nineteenth century", and the vampires who stroll its night-time, gaslit streets are nothing but the very image of the *flaneur*' (162), a cultured observer; a dandy who may not have been noticed by mortal eyes, but was certainly there. For Punter, then, Rice writes 'a historical parable' and 'its distortions are implicitly offered as parallel to, and no less compelling than, those other distortions which are embedded in received and official version of the past' (162). The offer of history as exciting and different to the usual telling, but just as believable, appeals to a good number of the fans. Cheryl and Lea, for instance, discuss *The Queen of the Damned*:

Cheryl: I like the historical bit and anything to do with vampires because I like having to imagine what it was like. *The Queen of the Damned* - it gives it a theory like, it tries to give it a sensible explanation for it.

Lea: She went a bit over the top on that one. I like the idea of it stemming from the Egyptians, but I was not convinced in the way they were supposed to be invented. She's a bloody good writer though. Like, there's things that you read in her books that crops up somewhere else and so she must do a lot of research for her stories (291 – 292).

These fans enjoy Rice's alternative history, where the disavowed is given a 'sensible' explanation, and where events run parallel to official history and things 'crop up' from the history books. Diane likes *The Queen of the Damned* for similar reasons:

I love the Talamasca, and you see it's the history. I love history and that's part of it too. You know the vampires, you always get some kind of history in there too [...] I loved *The Queen of The Damned*. History again, 'cause you got the women and the

lineage and the Egyptian history. I loved that one, I loved *Queen of the Damned* (80).

The women vampire fans enjoy Rice's *Chronicles* both because of the believability of the vampire in a contemporary setting and also because of the believability of the history from whence it travelled. The simultaneous past/ present in the structure of the *Chronicles* is another of Rice's feats, for she has brought together an urge for the fantastic and supernatural to exist in the world-of-today that the fans inhabit, as well as retelling history where the fantastic is also believable. The *Chronicles* romanticise the present by linking it to an imaginary and magical past. Punter suggests that the gothic is 'a mode - perhaps *the* mode - of unofficial history' (187) and has suggested that the gothic mode of history provides resources for the imagination as compelling as realism. The Chapter Seven will return to the gothic as a mode of history and to Walter Benjamin, in a discussion of the fans sartorial practices and their appropriation of styles from the past.

Conclusion

This chapter has examined the reading practices of the women vampire fans. The complexity of this process has been analysed through the fans own accounts of their preference for sympathy, pathos and the gothic, serialization and familiarity as well as up-to-date and historical verisimilitude. Throughout these accounts the fans have demonstrated their obvious competence in discussing the formal properties of texts (even if these texts are not considered to be 'literature') and an understanding of how the texts are structured to produce particular results. Although the fans often use different terminology to the language of cultural criticism, their insights are frequently as astute. They have lucidly expounded the criteria of success in the selection of favourites and have shown that intense emotional proximity and critical distance are complimentary modes of engagement rather than binary opposites. This has challenged the notion that the fans identify involuntarily with fictional characters. The fans' complex reading skill and their consciousness of the structural operations of their favoured texts should be kept in mind as we move on to discuss the fans' adoption of a vampire from the *Chronicles* to relate to the self. The idea of taking on a fictional character and living out that role (however temporarily) is considered to be the greatest evidence of 'obsessive' and 'immature' interest (Jenkins, 1992). The following chapter will discuss the fan accounts

of relating one of the vampires to the self in order to question the derogatory labels attached to this practice. Instead it will be suggested that fans are both finding resources to articulate their own dissatisfactions and simultaneously testing out possibilities of self.

CHAPTER SIX: THE VAMPIRE AND THE SELF

Vampiric outsiderdom and the self

It is because of the vampire's plight, wrongly damned and misunderstood, that the fans can sympathise and thus relate to the vampires and relate them to themselves. They are forgivable outcasts and the fans empathise. Furthermore, the fans can relate to the pain of the vampires' sense of outsiderdom. Cheryl, for instance comments on her adolescence:

I was having problems with friends at school and stuff so I started getting into it a bit. Perhaps that's it. I don't know, perhaps that's why you identify with vampires - because you feel a bit of a misfit. And let's face it, there's more of a better image associated with vampires than like werewolves and witches (laughs) (175).

This quotation sums up both the duality of the vampire and the appeal of this duality; a misfit with a good image. Dee also says that 'she has always been a little bit different' as does Karen who 'never fit in'. Pam and Janet comment that although they have always been different, they 'went through the stage of trying to be normal', they got married and had children but realised that they could keep up the 'pretence' no longer. Pam says:

I think what we both did was because we felt so different, didn't we, even when we were young. We were sort of at odds with the little communities we were in. We were just totally different even though we had brothers and sisters and that (47).

Andrea comments that at work she puts on an act 'a little too happy, cheerful and bright, but that's not my true person' and Melinda recognises the loneliness of the vampire and states that 'it made enough of an impression on me and I decided this was something I identified with and deeply'. These feelings of outsiderdom and of 'not fitting in' jar against official discourses of an inclusive society. There is a sense that it is a personal failing rather than a social failing to feel oneself an outsider and it is to such unofficial anxieties that the gothic form today speaks.

As Chapter One argued, gothic theory suggests that the appeal of the gothic is to do with its ability to represent what is disavowed, to speak to anxieties and desires that are difficult to name and that the gothic form has persisted beyond the life of the gothic novel into contemporary horror fiction both on the screen and on the page because, like its ancestor, it is concerned with the contradictions of contemporary society that 'have no

name'. However, while the classic Gothic novel has been considered as a way for middle class audiences of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to cope with anxieties about modernity, and in particular that the Enlightenment did not fully bring about the civilised Augustan age of reason; the late twentieth century transformations of the gothic can be said to reflect the popular anxieties of our cultural moment. So, while the crisis of rationality continues to have a hold in areas of the intellectual sphere, for a popular audience 'contemporary manifestations of the Gothic open up deeply wounded and wounding questions about how fulfilment is to be achieved' (Punter, 1996 vol. 2: 189). This sense of the pain of not belonging is beautifully expressed by Rice's vampires. When the vampire Armand tells Louis that he is the 'spirit of the age', Louis responds 'I'm not the spirit of any age. I'm at odds with everything and always have been! I have never belonged anywhere with anyone at anytime!' Armand replies 'But Louis [...] This is the very spirit of your age. Don't you see that? Everyone feels as you feel. Your fall from grace and faith has been the fall of a century (Rice, 1976: 288). This passage is open to interpretation and at least one academic critic, Ken Gelder, considers Louis' character to embody the current crisis of knowing. Gelder does acknowledge that the *Chronicles*, 'share a number of characteristics usually associated with women's fiction - notably, the tracing out of the vampire's search for fulfilment, for a 'complete' love relationship' (1994: 109). But for Gelder, these romantic themes are dispersed through other topics, in particular a 'dialectic between belief and disbelief, illusion and dissolution' (110) that is characteristic of our disillusioned times, where knowing or being is a posture. For the women fans, though, the notion of ideal love is a central element in the attraction of the *Chronicles*. Pam makes this comment about the love between the vampires:

it's a brilliant love to love like that unconditionally and just it doesn't matter - it doesn't matter whether you love a male or you love a female I mean why should you be ashamed because you love a female (238).

The view of ideal love as something that disrupts conventional male/female relations is one that the fans share and many talk of a special female connection. These themes connect to the search for fulfilment and remain salient in the fans' enjoyment in the tales and in relating these themes to themselves. This is demonstrated in the following exchange between Pam and Janet:

Janet: I think everyone would love not to grow old, to be immortal and to have those strengths and the knowledge that

they've had to go off through the centuries and just gains all that knowledge -

Pam: Instead of cramming it into a few short years -

Janet: And never forget it and the love they feel for each other, that sort of binding love that they never lose for each other no matter where they are or how separate they are, they always feel it-

Pam: And that's what you and me always feel innit? It's always been there [Janet nods agreement] - no matter what (142 – 148).

This exchange articulates a dissatisfaction with life's 'few short years', but also the importance for fulfilment which is discussed in ways 'usually associated with women's fiction' - fulfilment in personal relationships and the importance of 'binding love'. The way these fans relate the vampires to their own relationship demonstrates that the themes are primary rather than secondary in the women fans' interpretations.

The fans, then, empathise both with the vampires' outsiderdom *and* the love between the vampires that makes living their existence bearable. These fans have found in the *Chronicles* a fiction which speaks of pain and love in a way that resonates with their experiences in the world. Further 'unspeakable' anxieties articulated in *The Vampire Chronicles* are to do with the search for fulfilment and personal significance and this raises what our culture denies - the impossibility of these states for most of us most of the time. It will be suggested in the following section that the women vampire fans engagement with the gothic and melodramatic version of the vampire myth stems from the way that it addresses the experience of these dilemmas, produced by social contradictions that are disavowed in western culture. What follows, then, is an examination of the women fans' accounts of contradictory areas of experience to do with the notion of personal fulfilment and significance.

The vampire, the self and the dilemma of personal fulfilment

Lucien Goldmann observed that bourgeois society produces an 'internal contradiction between individualism as a universal value [...] and the important and painful limitations that this society itself brought to the possibilities of the development of the individual' (Goldmann, translation 1975: 12). Bourgeois society promises personal fulfilment and significance as well as creating the conditions which ensures its achievement is unattainable. The following comment from Janet expresses a common attitude amongst the fans that one's everyday life is rather meaningless and lacking in significance, and that the image of the vampire poses an alternative to this:

I just can't believe that this is all there is to it - we're born and then we live and then we die [...] I mean Lestat made such a big impact on everyone he met (736).

Later on in the interview Pam comments:

he's never satisfied [Lestat], he always has to look for more thing, to challenge one more thing. It's what you and me keep doing (777).

Also Andrea, who comments a number of times about the boredom of work, and on how she hides her real self and would 'like to live that way [like a vampire] all the time' comments, 'I can feel boxed in'. Andrea claims, however, that she has 'an affinity' with the vampires who always 'go one step further'. Melinda concurs that:

immortals can take it to a deeper level and they can explore things in much more depth - they have the luxury of time. And you toss in the vampiric beauty and perfect pitch (laughs) (97).

These comment express both the frustration at the quest for fulfilment and significance ('one more challenge') *and* the pleasure in the fictional representation of a character such as Lestat the vampire who can make 'such a big impact' and take things to a 'deeper level'. Lestat, through his own preoccupation with his insignificance to humanity offers a fantasy taste of 'personal significance' to his fans.

That Lestat and (to a lesser extent Louis) personally come to represent the dilemma of insignificance and the imaginary means of overcoming this, can be seen to be an example of the gothic/melodramatic sensibility. For, as Brooks argues, melodrama and the gothic are 'peculiarly modern' forms (1976: 16) precisely because they insist on viewing the social in *personal* terms. Brooks argues that they are rooted in the emergent discourses of individualism which were replacing the traditional Sacred nomination of the moral universe and this represents the inability to realise ethics, morality and spirituality in anything other than personal terms. This was the moment when significance and fulfilment began to be seen as the property of the individual self. Written in the latter half of the twentieth century with the periods' persistent discourses of individualism, the new gothic vampire tales also situate significance in individual and personal terms. The women fans discuss their dissatisfaction with their own lives both in terms of a lack of individual significance - 'I can't believe this is all there is' - and a desire for adventure. The vampire is seen to offer an exciting alternative (despite its pathos) which is clearly demonstrated in the following comment from Janet:

it would be just the perfect life style, it really would, [...] you could live a life that you had always wanted to (296).

Karen agrees:

I'd love it [to be a vampire] yeah, I'd love it. You could do what you wanted to do, nobody could oppose you, you'd be very dextrous... you'd work under the shadow of darkness, you know. Who'd miss the sunlight, who'd miss the day (116)?

Pam makes similar comments:

they [vampires] don't have to bother with the rigmarole and the palaver that us humans have to go through sometimes. I'd love to dispense with it all and just have none of it. It would be ideal wouldn't it (327).

The women clearly feel that the vampire offers significance and meaning missing in day to day life. Thus the anxiety that 'has no name', and to which vampire image can speak in a contemporary setting is the obscure contradiction between the discourses of personal fulfilment, 'you could live the life you had always wanted to' and the recognition that these discourses are a fiction. The vampire offers adventure, excitement and passion lacking in day to day life. In particular it addresses the question of personal fulfilment in a society that continues to ensure that the potential for self is curtailed. As Brooks argues, melodrama and the gothic form 'are modes which insist that reality can be exciting, can be equal to the demands of the imagination' (Brooks 1976: 6), and this structuring of vampire narratives appeals to the women fans by offering the means of achieving excitement and significance. Melinda recognises this clearly when she comments that:

these extraordinary characters [...] are the best and the worst, but always the ultimate of what a human can become (98).

The vampire offers the fans an imaginative means of managing the experience of a central cultural paradox; the promise of personal fulfilment and significance in a social set up which curbs the potential of the majority. This dilemma is not gender specific and although this thesis has focused on the accounts of women fans, male participants in vampire fandom may concur, particularly as the ones that I have spoken to hold the *Chronicles* in high regard. However, it will be argued in the next chapter that there are specifically female aspects of this experience, because femininity too is a cultural paradox. Most of the women fans construct vampiric identities through 'attitude', dress and adornment and these identities are self conscious refutations of the expectations of

femininity. Before the practices that fans engage in are analysed, however, there will be a discussion of the way that fans tend to refer to a specific vampire from the *Chronicles* through which they imagine a vampire self. The following section will analyse the fans' adoption of, and association with, one of Rice's vampires and will consider ways of understanding how the close engagement with a vampire figure may operate.

The vampire, the self and the question of identification

A considerable amount of each interview with the fans discussed how they relate particular vampire characters to themselves and how they recognise in the different vampires, aspects of themselves. For example Karen explains why Armand is her favourite:

The perfect image of a vampire to me I think really is, um, the character out of Anne Rice's book - Armand. He's strong, he's silent, he's charismatic, he calculates, he plans. I'm like that, I'm a real observer. Jesse will tell you I am a real manipulator, I really am ... Lestat - he's a risk taker, and I am to a certain extent, but only if I know I'm going to win, so really the end risk is minimal, whereas the Lestat character is just - throw caution to the wind, you know? [...] Armand is a planner, he's a thinker you know? He ponders, he sees things clearly, he puts things in order, which is the way I would do it, very methodical, very, very methodical. But he is very elegant and well... he is very dark not in an evil way but [...] he is the kind of person that if I met a kind of person like him - as I am you know just an ordinary person - I would be very wary about approaching him (24).³³

Karen is clearly relating Armand to herself. This type of association of self with a fictional 'other' is generally labelled 'identification' and despite the differing intellectual traditions which utilise the term (psychoanalysis, media effects theories), there is a shared conception that what is involved is, as Barker puts it, the value-laden notion that we can 'lose ourselves' (1989: 95) in the text. So, from a Lacanian perspective, Karen is considered to be a subject 'whose identity is constituted through the specular misrecognition of an *other*' (Friedberg, 1990: 39). For Friedberg '[i]dentification with a film star does not entail a cognitive choice but draws upon a repertoire of unconscious processes' (36). Furthermore, as we have seen, Gelder's comments about identification in *Interview with the Vampire* imply the notion of the power of texts to compel identification. He argues that the novel 'builds its own ideal reception' for the 'converted reader, the fan' (1994: 110). Textual mechanisms, then, are given the power to convert the reader and identification is assured. However, Karen has not lost herself

in the character Armand. She may consider herself to be ‘cool’ and ‘methodical’ like Armand, but she is aware that she is ‘just an ordinary person’. She is also aware that others may see her differently:

Jesse thinks I’m more like Lestat, well my temperament is. Well I totally disagree. I see myself as very cool, very calm and she sees me as going totally off the rails and going ballistic at things (25).

This undermines the idea that she has so fully ‘projected’ herself into Armand (or indeed introjected his character into herself) that she is unaware either of the difference between herself and Armand. She has not lost her sense of self in her character and therefore alternative explanations for her association with this character are needed.

As Chapter One demonstrated, Tudor (1974) and Stacey (1994) are two of the few theorists who attempt to characterise identification as a set of more complex process and while I accept Barker’s rejection of this concept, I will be using some of their analyses of the processes of viewing and reading. Tudor for instance, adopts the perspective that ‘does not start from a mass media prejudice’ of an audience ‘brainwashed’ (75). Instead, he argues that ‘the star-conception is a product of both the projected image of the star and whatever characteristics specific individuals project into their own conception.’ Written in 1974, Tudor’s comments are a harbinger of debates to come, representing an early promotion of the idea that audiences have pre-existing selves through which they read texts. He argues that although a star has an independent existence, ‘the star also becomes a receptacle for the projected desires, frustrations, and pleasures of the fan’ (83). He also argues that even ‘extreme projection’ where a fan lives a life largely bound up with the favoured star, ‘is not a simple case of influence; a wielding of media power’ (83).

In a similar vein to Hobson’s comments about soap opera stars (discussed above), Tudor argues that many film stars “‘play themselves” to varying degrees’ (77), and that stars develop a ‘relatively fixed persona’ (77) both in casting terms and in the minds of the audience. But the vampires are not screen characters attached to real people with star status who embody their characteristics and this is an important difference that will be discussed below. Nevertheless, thinking about the vampires in the *Chronicles* in terms of stardom is rather apt in other ways. They have glamour, beauty and prominence in their own world and Lestat has at least temporary celebrity in the mortal world during his stint as a rock star. The first person narrative structure of the *Chronicles* contributes to this sense of celebrity for those readers prepared to suspend their disbelief and play

along; all of the vampires are known to the mortal world because they each write their own autobiographies which circulate in the real world and are known as *The Vampire Chronicles*. Thus Tudor's comments about star/fan relations are relevant. The vampires become receptacles for fan desires, rather than the fans becoming receptacles for textual influence.

Furthermore, Tudor suggests that stars offer fans a way of thinking about their own reality. He argues, '[i]n asking themselves what the star might have done in this situation the star-struck are using the star as a way of dealing with their realities' (83). As was suggested above, vampire fans are engaging with the vampire because the figure offers a way of thinking about how certain 'realities' or dilemmas are experienced and felt. These propositions, then, help an understanding of the vampire/fan relationship in a way that both makes sense of the kinds of things the fans themselves say and that insists that fans are not the dupes of mass culture or unconscious drives. However, Tudor's formula for identification still retains a residue of the idea that there is a "'normal" response' (81) which is a 'standard sense of involvement' on the one hand (80) and 'idealisation' and 'idolisation' which is a more 'extreme' 'projection' (83) on the other. This scaling of identification is a reworking of Leo Handel's analysis of audience reactions (Handel 1950) and rests on an opposition between 'emotional affinity', which is the weakest form of identification, and the 'self-identification' of the fan which involves the stronger modes of imitation and projection which he associates with youth and femininity (83). But in Jackie Stacey's study dealing with female fans of Hollywood stars during the 1940's and 1950's, she finds Tudor's model 'overly schematic and in need of further elaboration' (136). She is concerned with the 'multiplicity of processes' that cannot be accounted for in these categorisations, such as fantasy and memory. Nevertheless, Tudor's insights about fandom as a mode of dealing with one's own realities and stars as receptacles for fans' 'desires, frustrations and pleasures' is useful. Furthermore, it distinguishes between the 'audience-star relations' which take place while watching or reading in 'context specific' ways and those which 'take place outside the [...] context' (136). Also it introduces a twofold dimension of fan/star relations by suggesting that frustration and pleasure can operate concurrently. Finally, it does not conceptualise 'desire' as the binary opposite of identification as psychoanalytic models tend to (Friedburg, 1990; Laplanche and Pontalis, 1973; Metz, 1982; Mulvey, 1975).

Stacey is also interested in theorising identification to include forms of desire, 'rather than being constructed as its opposite' (135). She argues that 'there is a misplaced

assumption that “desire”[...] can be straightforwardly conceptualised within the psychoanalytic model of “erotic object choice” and, as such, is necessarily the opposite of “identification” (172) and for Stacey it is inadequate to counter pose ‘wanting to “have”’ and ‘wanting to “be”’ (172) in this way. Instead, Stacey suggests that the myriad processes of identification can be a way of testing out a ‘potential self’ based on ‘some similarity between star and spectator’ (129). This chapter will draw on Stacey’s analysis of spectator/star relations to analyse the fans’ engagement with the vampire in terms of this idea of potential self in the following section. However, as has been stated, this thesis will not employ the term ‘identification’. Most fans themselves use terms such as ‘associate’ or ‘relate to’ to articulate their relation to the vampire, and even those who do use the term do not share implications of loss of self in the meaning of the term. The complexity of the processes of the fans’ attachments to the vampire discussed above, combined with their evident self-awareness suggests that Barker’s rejection of this concept is valid. The above quotations from Karen demonstrate the she, like other fans, is drawn to the vampire image to think about and talk about the self, reflecting on and evaluating the characteristics which the vampires are seen to embody. This chapter will now move on to examine what this talk reveals about the potential for self that the vampire offers.

Women and the vampire: the possibility of self.

Jackie Stacey suggests that the relationship between female spectators and stars is an intense attachment actually to do with possibilities for the self. Stacey suggests that Hollywood stars may have significance for women ‘in terms of their representation of a fantasy self never realised’ (1994: 65). The following comment from Janet demonstrates that she recognises aspects of herself in Lestat and that this is the basis of thinking about a self that is not realisable:

I’m not conventional, I obviously don’t go to the extremes as what Lestat goes to, but I’d love to. I’d love to do what he does - we’ve decided that there’s nothing that he wouldn’t sort of challenge (256).

Stacey argues that ‘forms of recognition of the self in the idealised other, or indeed recognition of the desired self in the idealised other, inform the choices and selection of favourite stars made by spectators’ (209). This is clearly in operation in Janet’s choice of Lestat, just as it was in Karen’s choice of Armand. Stacey’s notion then that stars offer ‘the possible fantasy of something better’ (126) is applicable to these fans’

relationships to their favoured vampires. There is a 'negotiation between spectators and their star ideals [that] is the recognition of similarities and differences' (128). However, it must be recognised that testing out a potential self as a vampire is not entirely the same as testing out possibilities of self in a female Hollywood star such as Betty Grable (although both are rather glamorous). There are common themes to do with recognising the self in an other and recognising the difference between self and other, but there are significant differences. Vampires, unlike Hollywood stars, are not social ideals but social renegades. The vampire, outcast and undead, can never be simply an optimistic ideal self. In this cultural choice, the fans are openly revealing their pain (at their sense of outsiderdom and pathos). But they are also demonstrating defiance at their sense of difference. Richard Dyer has lucidly summed up the way that the vampire embodies this duality with his comment that it represents 'self loathing which converts to pride' (1993: 10). This is discernible in Cheryl's comments about Louis, 'but also it's appealing, being a vampire and living forever and being a tortured soul really' (23). Karen expresses a stronger version of this sentiment, 'they say [...] you have got to conform to society, I have never conformed to society and I never will you know?' (48).

Stacey suggests that trying out possible selves through an ideal other is a complex mix of recognising similarities and differences and this explanation is one which accords with the women vampire fans accounts of their engagement with particular vampires. But, as we saw in the previous chapter, idealising the vampire is complicated by the critical judgements of the actions of favourite vampires arising from the serial nature of the tales. There is a further dimension to relating oneself to the vampire and vice-versa. The fans who wanted to be interviewed in pairs or in small groups make use of Rice's vampires to discuss with each other what kind of people they are. For example, throughout their interview Pam and Janet define themselves in relation to each other. They discuss their favourite vampire characters to describe, criticise and value the self and each other. This takes place in an atmosphere of intense mutual affection and decades of friendship:

Janet: I'm more like Lestat. We've always said that even when we first started reading the books. She's Louis and I'm Lestat from the books, I suppose I am really... Pam is more of a -

Pam: I think it all out.

Janet: "Oh, I don't know, we didn't ought to do that, oh dear".

Pam: I'm methodical. I think about it and I think of any outcomes, you just dive in. I'll think about a situation. We get presented with a situation, I'll think about it -

Janet: She's a Louis -
 Pam: Yeah, what'll happen -
 Janet: "Ah, but what if?" -
 Pam: And the consequences and so we know how to deal with the consequences *when* they happen -
 Janet: [laughs] I mean when we were going to join this group and I went head long in and said "yeah, I'll do it" -
 Pam: She said, "I'm just going out for a walk, I'll be a while, I'll just borrow a wine glass" and I never saw her again.
 Janet: I never came back.
 Pam: Some chap goes riding by in his tight trousers on his charger and you're off [they both laugh a lot].
 Janet: But Louis was always there for Lestat even the trouble he got into, Louis was always there -
 Pam: Yeah, I know.
 Janet: I want to be him, I want to be Lestat.
 Pam: Well I'm not going to rescue you if you take on Beelzebub
 (both laugh) (258 – 273)

There are a number of processes at work in this exchange, none of which could be easily labelled identification on its own, and in the context of the exchange overall, the potential for the concept to provide any explanatory power recedes further.

This exchange epitomises the interviews with pairs of fans in that they use the vampire characters types to talk not just about themselves but also about their relationships. Janet may want 'to be Lestat', but she demonstrates enough self-awareness to recognise both that she is *not* Lestat and that his character is trouble. She also relies on Pam's more cautious approach to life to help her out of her own trouble. The fans' cultural choices, then, are not totally directed at the self, but are part of their wider sets of relations, friendship networks and club memberships. These fans are as interested in how the vampire can be applied to a friend as to themselves. There has recently been a move to consider media consumption in the context of family relationships and friends (Barker and Brooks, 1989; Gillespie, 1995; Gray, 1992; Hobson 1990; Morley, 1986; Thomas, 2000). Instead of conceptualising the audience member alone with her screen and vulnerable to its messages, these studies demonstrate communal nature of viewing and of how relationships impact on media consumption. The importance of relationships seems particularly relevant to the fans of the *Chronicles* because despite the emphasis on personal and individual meaning, the relationship between the vampires is also central to the structure of the tales. This is a melodramatic form of the gothic in which, as Brooks puts it, 'interpersonal relations are not merely contacts of the flesh but encounters that must be carefully nurtured, judged, handled as if they mattered' (1976: 22). Thus the

fans' cultural interests are not simply about self. The exchange quoted above also demonstrates a clear awareness that the vampires embody 'types', (she's *a* Louis) with distinct values (Louis/caution – Lestat/rebellion). The fans relate these values to themselves and each other, but not as simple idealised projections of self. They also articulate the hazards of those values as well as recognition that they are not the vampire they would like to be. There is recognition of difference between self and the vampire 'other'.

The fans are matching themselves and each other to favoured vampires but, while they may see themselves as similar to a particular vampire, they also recognise the difference, and it is in the gap between self and imagined self, that resides the desire to test out a potential self. Also, rather than compulsive identification with the vampire, there is a recognition that one cannot lead the (vampiric) life one desires. It may be that the fans' simultaneous construction of vampire selves and recognition of their difference to their vampire 'ideals' is part of the appeal of the gothic and melodramatic structuring of the fans' vampire favourites. As Gledhill argues, melodrama typically produces an 'over-investment in the symbol, combined with the impossibility with actually living it' (1987: 35). The fans' attachment to the melodramatic vampire, then, is not only to do with its pathos, but also its strength; a strength one recognises that one does not fully possess, but nevertheless aspires to. This structuring enables the fans to recognise themselves in the vampire and its predicament, but also to try out potential selves, imaging themselves through the strength of the vampire. Yet, rather than being 'dupes' of the melodramatic structuring, the fans clearly acknowledge the 'impossibility of living it'. But this does not stop them wishing that things could be different for the self and that the vampire offers images of new potential selves. As Karen puts it:

the vampire is a free spirit [...] things can still damage them, but it's just pure freedom, really. It really is freedom (237).

Conclusion

The women fans can be seen to be testing out potential selves through the figure of the vampire. Like the women in Stacey's study who consider their potential through idealised Hollywood idols, the fans' ideals are never fully realised. Stacey writes, '[t]he gap between self and idea [...] continually reproduces female subjectivity, the difference between the two endlessly deferring the fulfilment of desire' (1994: 209). But Stacey argues that this process paradoxically 'gives rise to new and different identities through

selection, appropriation, and conversion of feminine ideal as self-image' (204). The difference, of course, is that the vampire is not an ideal, but a member of the undead; not an idealised feminine figure, but a borderline figure. Yet, this seems to somehow further emphasise the difficulty in attaining the potential residing in the image of the vampire, as it holds in tandem both possibility and its negation. The vampire fans read the vampire not as death - but as possibility - but this is laced with recognition that it is an outsider and a pathos steeped-creature and, like the gothic heroine of old, is locked in circumstances outside its control. Thus the vision of the possibilities residing in the vampire may not be dead, but they are 'undead'.

The images that the women are drawing on, then, are not the optimistic vision of a potential utopia that critics have suggested other popular art forms offer their audiences (Dyer, 1985; Jenkins 1992). In fact, Brooks argues that the gothic and melodramatic diverge in their presentation of imaginative universes; melodrama offering optimistic 'angelic spheres' (1976: 20) and the gothic that of pessimistic 'demonic depths' (20). Punter agrees that the gothic 'unlike utopian fiction [...] actually demonstrates within itself the mechanisms which enforce non-fulfilment. Rather than jumping straight from an existent situation to a projection of its opposite, the Gothic takes us on a tour through labyrinthine corridors of repression, gives us glimpses of the skeletons of undead desires and makes them move again' (1980: 409). This is culturally valuable because it dares to 'speak the unspeakable' (417), but, as Punter suggests, 'the very act of speaking it is an ambiguous gesture' (417). For Punter the possibilities raised by the gothic form are as contradictory as the system that gave it birth, and this continues to be true today. The gothic melodrama that the fans favour is inscribed by the contradictions that it speaks to. The potentials raised and the desires articulated are of the self rather than society. They offer defiance, but retain a strong sense of individualism; of *personal* transformation rather than social transformation. They are also transformations that cannot be realised, for one cannot really become a vampire. Nevertheless, the image of the vampire offers the women a means of handling the contradictory experiences of the self and the dilemma of significance and fulfilment. The vampire symbolises the pain of the socially unacknowledged impossibility of fulfilling one's potential as well as raising - in vampiric form - the potential of fulfilment, with a vampire's power to enact personal transformation. The following chapter will examine how the possibilities residing in the image of the vampire have been appropriated by the fans in their sartorial schemes. It will be demonstrated that central to the construction of vampiric identities is the way the

image of the vampire offers a means of handling another cultural paradox, the experience of femininity.

CHAPTER SEVEN: FEMININITY, THE VAMPIRE AND DRESSING THE SELF

Introduction

This chapter begins a variety of analyses of the practices of vampire fandom that the women fans in Britain and the USA engage in, and will concentrate on the fans' construction of vampire selves through dress. Chapter Five examined the fans' readings of the vampire, their selection of favourites and the criteria this is based on. Chapter Six suggested links between the fannish interpretation of the vampire and the fans' sense of self. This chapter will examine the fans' accounts of self in terms of their *sartorial practices* and the inspiration they draw from the realm of the vampire in their sartorial schemes. Although this chapter is concerned with the influence of the vampire on dressing the self, it will suggest that the fictional vampire does speak of broader cultural concerns. Numerous theorists of the vampire have provided outstanding accounts of the relationship between textual transformations of the figure and historically specific social concerns (Auerbach, 1995; Gordon and Hollinger, 1997; Gelder, 1994; Carroll, 1990; Tudor, 1989; Jancovich, 1992; Roth 1984, Zimmerman, 1984). Furthermore, as Entwistle has argued, dressing one's body is a social activity that can never be divorced from both micro 'individual experiences of dress' and macro social processes (2000: 4). Dress is theorised by Entwistle as a 'situated practice' (39) operating on the boundary 'between the individual and the social world' (7). This chapter will thus develop the argument put in the previous chapter that the women fans' engagement with the vampire is connected to their experiences in 'culture'. It was proposed there that part of the pleasure of reading the vampire is the way it provides the fans with the means of handling the paradox of 'self'. Drawing on theories of dress and gender (Entwistle, 2000; Hollander, 1993; Macdonald, 1995; Stacey, 1994; Tseëlon, 1995; Wilson, 1985) this chapter will address the gendered dimension of the experience of 'self' to argue that the sartorial choices of the women vampire fans are also to do with their experience in 'culture', but that these are specific responses to the ambivalent category of 'femininity'. Part of the pleasure of appropriating vampiric symbols is in producing a sense of self (as outsider) not tied to a feminine ideal which the fans find impossible to achieve. The women fans' self presentation as vampiric, it will be argued then, is a specific response to the broader context of gender that all women face, but experience and deal with differently.

The analysis of women dressing as vampires has been grounded in the women's accounts in order to allow the categories and frameworks of interpretation to emerge from the types of things *the fans* say about what they do (see Chapter Three). This has pointed me in the direction of two theoretical areas not generally associated with theories of the vampire. The first is the relationship between the paradoxical experience of femininity and sartorial behaviour of women as detailed in the empirical studies of women and dress provided by Tseëlon (1995), Stacey (1994) and Entwistle (2000). The second comes from the literature on fashion, particularly the discussions offered by Wilson (1985) and Hollander (1993) on the role of black in oppositional dress. These approaches offer valuable conceptual means of analysing the women fans' self-declared motivations for appropriating symbols of 'outsiderdom'. This chapter will therefore consider what these alternative approaches can offer to an understanding of women vampire fans and their attitudes towards dress and identity.

This chapter will begin with a discussion of the category of femininity and the potential experiences that may be generated by its paradoxical status. It will then examine how the women vampire fans articulate their experience of femininity and their motivations for adopting vampiric sartorial schemes. The relationship between these will be examined through three interrelated themes: the first is the women's experience of 'not fitting in' to ideas about feminine norms. Connected to this is the appropriation of vampiric imagery in their dress as a way of producing identities that 'stand out' as different. Thirdly the role of a particular gothic use of black apparel (drawing on the colour's anti-fashion or oppositional symbolism) in the construction of these identities will be examined.

Femininity as ambivalence: experiencing a paradox

Feminist critics from such diverse fields as the sociology of the body (Tseëlon, 1995) and film theory and spectatorship (Stacey, 1994) argue that women's experiences of themselves in the west are framed by the paradoxical category of femininity. For both Tseëlon and Stacey, the paradox of femininity is focused on the female body, producing impossible and contradictory 'norms' which women face as cultural expectations. As Stacey puts it, feminine ideals are 'by definition, never realisable, since they fundamentally contradict each other (such as the constructions of motherhood and sexual desirability)' (1994: 65). The image of 'woman' is at once equivocal and unattainable. Stacey argues that 'femininity is conventionally reproduced within dominant culture

through the circulation of idealised images, constructed as desirable and yet unattainable' (116). She comments that 'the female body, in particular, can always be guaranteed to be at fault' (208).

For Tseëlon, woman is an 'impossible creature who is given a space and no space at all, who is offered a position while being denied that position, who embodies a thing and its opposite at the same time' (1995: 2). Furthermore, Tseëlon argues that this ambivalence is centred on the notion that femininity is constructed as artifice and then derided for lacking authenticity. This leads to a further paradox that woman signifies beauty, but that women do not embody beauty. As Tseëlon argues, 'woman is placed in a no-win situation. She is expected to embody a "timeless" cultural phantasy (sic), but is not naturally more attractive than a man. Her special beauty is at best a temporary state, and it takes hard work and concerted effort to maintain' (79).

Stacey, Tseëlon and Entwistle analyse the different ways that women handle this contradiction. Tseëlon argues that as a result of this ambivalence, 'personal appearance' comes to frame women's social positions and influences 'the way she comes to think of herself' (3). She suggests that women are highly conscious of their 'visible self' (54) when dressing. Women, argues Tseëlon, make subtle distinctions not only about the situation, but also about the audience and their own state of mind. They distinguish between 'significant' audiences, whose opinions 'matter' and those that do not; between 'comfortable' and 'uncomfortable' situations taking greater effort, care and consciousness of what they wear in the latter. In other words, women worry about being dressed inappropriately because they are made conscious of their appearance. Tseëlon argues therefore, that feeling 'visible, exposed, observed or on show appear to be internalised into the self-conception'. (54)

Entwistle also argues that 'consciousness of bodily appearance is gendered' and that 'women more than men view their bodies as objects "to be looked at"' (2000: 31). Entwistle suggests that 'women may have to think more carefully about how they appear in public than men' (34) and she offers an example of professional women who will take off their jacket at work only in the privacy of their own office in order to 'avoid sexual glances from men' (34). Drawing on Goffman's work, Entwistle emphasises the relationship between situation, dress and moral order. She argues, like Tseëlon, that when we are dressed 'inappropriately, we feel vulnerable and embarrassed' (35). However, this is not simply a 'personal *faux pas*, but the shame of failing to meet the

standards required of one by the moral order of the social space (35). For Entwistle too then, women ‘internalize particular rules or norms of dress’ (34).

Stacey’s study focuses on women and their female Hollywood idols to analyse how the women negotiate a match and mismatch between self and ideal self through a favourite star image. She argues that ‘[s]ince desirable ideals are always changing with new fashion trends, and feminine ideals are actually never fully realisable, the one is always contradicted by the other.’ (1994: 208) Stacey also suggests that feminine insecurities about ‘the attainment of bodily perfection are a reasonably sure bet for the endless reproduction of commodities for feminine self-improvement’ (208). She argues that female fans of female Hollywood stars ‘attempt to close the gap between self and desired feminine other through the consumption of commodities for the improvement of the female body’ (208) which are associated with particular Hollywood stars.

Each of these theorists has emphasised the relationship between dressing the female body, acting on the female body to improve it and the culture discourses of femininity which structure experience and a woman’s sense of self. Tseëlon and Stacey in particular emphasise the paradoxical nature of cultural discourses on femininity. By drawing on these analyses, it will be suggested that the identities produced by the women vampire fans might also be understood as responses to the paradox of femininity, but that they are specific responses and as Entwistle puts it are ‘situated’ (29).

It has been suggested in Chapter Five that the women fans sympathise with the vampire’s predicament; the pathos of being locked in circumstances beyond one’s control, being forced to be an outsider. The following section will examine how the women relate the vampire’s predicament of ‘outsiderdom’ to their own feelings of ‘not fitting into’ the norms of femininity as expressed through appearance and dress.

The experience of ‘not fitting in’

The context of ‘femininity’ which Tseëlon and Stacey suggest is the realm of impossible contradictions also frames the experiences of the women vampire fans in Britain and New Orleans, for they face the same ambivalent category of ‘femininity’ that other women face. But their experience of femininity, and the sartorial identities they construct as a result, are *specific* responses to these more general conditions. The women vampire fans rather than struggling to internalise the impossible, instead experience themselves as ‘not fitting in’. They have a notion of ‘normal’ femininity which is symbolised in the colour pink and is to do with competently following fashion

trends, which many of the fans have never felt able to manage. Many of the fans comment that 'pink frilly dresses' and 'little pumps' were not for them. The notion of 'not fitting in', of 'being different' is evidenced in the following comments from different fans in Britain:

Cheryl: as I say, at school I found it difficult to make friends and wear trendy clothes. I didn't fit in so, I didn't like the way I looked – or the way I was supposed to look and I started getting into the goth look (181).

Dee: I went Goth at the age of 16 when I was training as a hair dresser...[because] I just didn't fit in and I didn't like the way I looked...I guess I have always been a little bit different (512).

Pam and Janet have a similar sense of not fitting in:

Pam: We went through a stage of trying to be normal. I think that is why we got married so young, and had kids so young and was trying to fit in somewhere innit?

Janet: and then realising that actually you were just different and that's it –

Pam: we've done some strange things together -

Janet: You stand out

Pam: You stick out like a sore thumb

Janet: Yeah, well, I never did fit in and besides I look terrible in pink (51 – 56).

The fans are experiencing the paradoxical demands of contemporary femininity as ones that they are unable to meet and thus their sympathy with the vampire's 'outsiderdom' echoes their own diffident relationship with notions of femininity. Like the British fans, many of the American fans make comments about 'not fitting in', about their inability to follow fashion and their dissatisfaction with themselves in 'normal' women's clothes.³⁴

Shirin who comments that she wears 'basic black' says:

Well, it started out more because I didn't want to go around in the normal thing for girls back then. It was interesting. It was intriguing. It was mysterious [...] Then, when it used to really annoy a lot of people back in the 60s and 70s if people wore black in this town, they were all odd to say the least. So I got a lot of flak. So the more annoyed they were, the more bent out of shape they became, the more I would definitely show up in black (312 - 314).

For Andrea, pink is 'a little bit happy, cheerful and bright' (124). She comments:

Well it's, I think because the rest of um the time, like my work, I would not normally dress in a hot pink suit, you know with little

pumps. That is not what I'm comfortable with. Um or you know a navy blue you know suit [...] Or whatever, you know, that I wear to work. Um I don't like um having to wear glasses, wear my hair plain and boring and have to be you know that um I guess, I feel like I'm boxed in. I prefer to be able to go out and do what I want, say what I want and that's the way I am the rest of my life. I mean, even if all I'm wearing is a black outfit and fangs, you know? (563 – 565).

This sense of 'not fitting in' could be interpreted along psychoanalytic lines that the fans are experiencing themselves through the distorting mirrors that patriarchy holds up to women (Williams, 1984). Feminist psychoanalysis has suggested that the woman is fixed by the 'male gaze' which objectifies and/or distorts her image through the processes of fetishism and voyeurism. This in turn robs her of the power of self definition. This view was inaugurated by Mulvey's ground-breaking article on the cinema and visual pleasure. (Mulvey, 1975). However, many feminists have criticised this perspective as 'monolithic' not only in terms of the processes of spectatorship (Gledhill, 1978; Byars, 1988; Pribram, 1988) but also in terms of women's experiences of 'self' through appearance. Stacey, for instance, takes issue with psychoanalytic models in which subjectivity is 'only conceptualised as an effect of textual polarities' (25) and criticises the way this theorises identification and object choice 'within a framework of binary oppositions (masculinity/femininity: activity/passivity) that necessarily masculinise active female desire' (27). Tseëlon argues that such models ignore the 'plurality, contradiction or resistance that exists' (1995: 68) in the realm of feminine identification. Tseëlon suggests that the effect of the general framework of femininity on women's sense of self is also influenced by local environment, on the people and situations and whether one feels secure or insecure. Entwistle, following Bourdieu, is critical of approaches that 'impose upon the world reified structures and rules which are seen to be independent from agency and practice' (36). The comments from the women vampire fans demonstrates that they do not feel secure with trends and 'normal' femininity and they experience this as 'not fitting in'. But this in turn has lead to a more potent self-definition as 'different'. Once more, this is not to argue that the women's' sense of self is cut off from, or resides outside of, the framework of 'femininity'; the women's comments illustrate an unhappiness not simply with the 'norm', but also with themselves (as misfits) in that context. However, the fans are not immobilised by the context of femininity, as the following section will demonstrate. The sense of not fitting into the norms of femininity has lead to the construction of vampire identities that enable the

women fans to transcend their ambivalent attitude to their mismatch with femininity and develop a stronger sense of self by taking pride in standing out.

Standing out

The women vampire fans have through sartorial means transformed a sense of not fitting into femininity into a defiant sense of standing out as different. Lea comments that her reason for wearing antique black gowns and fangs is to show that ‘you’re not just following everybody else’. Pam comments with a certain amount of pride ‘you do stand out cause you dress like this’:

Janet: It’s modern clothes, I hate modern clothes. We are like in a time warp aren’t we?

Pam: Yeah

Janet: Like we belong somewhere else, it’s like we just don’t belong in this century because its like - that’s why I love the way Louis and Lestat dress. I would love to dress like it all the time, I would I’d walk around our town dressed like it [...] I wear my black cape around I get a few odd looks, people think you’re strange but I don’t care, I wear it [...]

Pam: we do stand out if we are in a supermarket and everyone else is dressed in tweeds and brogues which does look sort of

Janet: Perhaps we’re just trying to make a point. I don’t know perhaps it is part of me that wants to make a point

Pam: You are different and you are saying you’re not just following everybody else (484 – 495)

Similarly in New Orleans, Shirin takes pride in being ‘one of the first’ and comments of the new vampire scene:

and all these young gothic types come along and act like they discovered the idea. All by themselves, you know [...] I was wearing black before they were born. (332 – 334)

This sense of pride also takes on a defiant edge as Shirin states:

I went to a shopping centre and there was some young teenager who was walking with someone else, a girl, and he said something about “sure is a dark day around here”. So I yelled out, “There sure are a lot of assholes around here” (312).

It is perhaps not surprising that the women fans’ identity construction has focused on dressing and modifying their bodies in particular ways, given as Stacey puts it, ‘the centrality of physical appearance to femininity in this culture’ (167). Myra Macdonald, in an analysis of femininity in the popular media, also suggests that ‘[t]he body has historically been much more integral to the formation of identity for women than for men’ and that this is problematic for women because of the way women have been

denied the right to self-definition in 'the history of cultural representation' (193). Macdonald argues that from the 1970s on, this leads to practices of reshaping the body and dressing in unusual ways in order to transfer claims of power from the public arena onto one's body, allowing groups 'threatened by cultural invisibility to assert their presence in striking and innovative ways' (193). These fans, while continuing to define themselves in relation to their appearance, (thus demonstrating that they have not overthrown the structuring context of femininity), have nevertheless made active decisions to reject certain trappings by taking pride in standing out as different and being seen (by others) as different. The positive side of the dual sense of considering oneself as 'different' and expecting to be seen by others this way, is summed up by Pam and Janet's comments about 'making a point' of not following normal dress trends.

Tseëlon maintains that the sense of self is always produced in relation to others and this is the case for the women fans whose sense both of 'not fitting in' and 'standing out' comes from how they feel they are perceived by others as is demonstrated by the comments above. The vampire women dress the way they do, despite negative reactions in public. Tseëlon argues that the self is a 'social process', residing not in the individual but as an 'outcome of human interaction' (40). This is paradoxical for women because women are expected to be 'authentically' feminine and yet 'femininity' is a construct, not a given. Tseëlon draws on Sartre to pull out this 'twofold paradox'. The very attempt to be authentic (i.e. feminine) for Sartre suggests that originally 'one is being what one is not' in that women can only become 'authentically feminine' with considerable effort (38). Furthermore, Tseëlon suggests that being authentic for woman is not 'being' for herself. Because 'authentic' femininity is constructed, it 'implies objectifying oneself, of seeing oneself through the eyes of the Other' (38). Women experience a relationship between appearance - how they are seen by others - and a sense of self and so come to experience the self through appearance in the eyes of others. Furthermore, woman's essence and appearance are intertwined and therefore her essence is ultimately conceived of as inessence; artifice, vanity, insincerity and display. Tseëlon argues that women manage these cultural expectations and the fragile sense of self that can result by having many sartorial faces and wearing their clothes like armour. Tseëlon emphasises that women are not being insincere or deceptive about self but that confidence is bound up with feeling good about one's appearance.

The women vampire fans too experience themselves through the eyes of others and are adopting sartorial identities which make them feel good about themselves. But for the vampire women feeling good does not translate into looking 'good' for others. Instead looking 'good' means looking different to others by rejecting 'pink', 'frilly' femininity. Indeed Andrea calls the way she is required to dress for her work in hospital administration her 'frump gear'. She describes herself as having two faces, the one for work which she calls her 'stage' face and the 'real' Andrea, her vampire face:

well, that's more like my true person [...] when I get dressed and I'm fully dressed with my make-up done and my teeth and everything else - that's when I feel most comfortable and I would, like I said I would live that way twenty four hours a day if I could because that's basically how I am (116 – 118)

Pam and Janet make similar comments:

Janet: we go to work conventional but come home and whip it off and put something different on straight away

Pam: Yeah I can't stand it and that's not me

Janet: Err take it all off and I hate it [...]

Pam: And I used to wear a *lovely* blue uniform and a navy blue skirt and a blouse, a firm white blouse and think "that's it", come home and "that's it", all off (497 – 503).

The claims these fans make about the authenticity of their vampire identities, the sense that this is the 'real' me, may be partly a response to the dominant notions of femininity as artifice that Tseëlon has argued shapes women's self perception (see above). Susie and I witnessed the transformation from one of Andrea's faces to the other, in the course of our interview. The interview began with Andrea in her 'frump gear' and it took the course of our two hour taped interview for her to dress and apply make-up before we were taken to a club by Andrea, her younger brother and her boyfriend. I wrote in my field notebook later that night 'we watched a short, round, bespectacled medical secretary transform before our eyes into the child vampire Claudia from *Interview With the Vampire* (Warner Bros. 1995). White foundation make-up was sponged to her face followed by cheeks and chin shaded with purple to create a translucent and bruise-like effect. Blonde hair extensions were applied to her peroxided hair to create a thick, wavy blonde mantle and realistic home-made fangs were attached to her teeth. Andrea then put on a tight bodiced gown of black velvet trimmed with satin lace, a hooded black satin cape and black pumps pointed at the toes.' Andrea's rejection of 'cheerful' and 'pink' femininity has found positive expression in a striking vampiric identity which she feels

expresses who she has come to be. It is clear that the fans' empathy with the vampire's outsiderdom, combined with their appropriation of the elegance and drama cut by the figure of the vampire, has provided a means of converting the experience of 'not fitting in' into a pride in difference and often this is expressed in claims of authenticity, 'this is my true person'.

The women vampire fans sartorial identities are actually no more nor less 'artificial' or 'authentic' than other 'outfits' that other women armour themselves in. That the women 'stand out' as a result of their sartorial choices and feel themselves to be different in the eyes of others is a reminder of how taken-for-granted are the standards of dress for women in each epoch, but also how women can and have challenged norms to create innovative styles through which to express self. For the women vampire fans then, the experience of not 'fitting in' to the perceived expectations of others has not lead to an increased attempt to internalise 'ideal femininity'. Instead it has lead to a rejection of those norms and the construction of an alternative sartorial identity. The women fans dress the part of the vampire with long capes in velvets and satins, silky dresses with flared sleeves and lace gloves, converting 'not fitting in' to 'standing out' as different. The following section will discuss the women's use of black to 'stand out' in the context of western ideas about this colour in sartorial schemes. It will then examine what the women are telling others about themselves through their vampiric sartorial identities.

Dressing in black and standing out

Combined with a rejection of 'pink' femininity, the fans' alternative dress is intended to ensure that they 'stand out' as different. Their sense of 'not fitting in' has not led to a self effacing sartorial identity, but one that calls attention to their 'difference'. Like Andrea in New Orleans and Pam and Janet in Britain, Cheryl and Lea also feel most themselves when they dress in black and stand out. The following exchange, when asked why they dress in black, demonstrate this impulse:

Lea: It's difficult to explain it really. Part of it is that you don't want to feel like normal people -

Cheryl: Yeah, not conforming -

Lea: It's a lot of things...the style of dress, its different. People look at you if you dress like this (156 – 158).

Again the sentiments are echoed by Andrea in New Orleans who comments:

the whole appearance of being a vampire gives you a lot of attention to feed off of. Either people are afraid of you, or they just adore you (837).

The women fold together their dislike for fashion trends, wanting to feel different and wanting to be seen to be different by cladding themselves in vampiric black. Black is the central colour in these women's wardrobes and is central to their sartorial identities. That the women choose black as the symbolic polar opposite of pink is not only to do with their perceptions of the norms of femininity. Black has long provided its wearers with the mark of difference. Hollander argues that there is a tradition of wearing black 'which seeks to isolate and distinguish the wearer' (1993: 377). For Hollander black can offer power and distinction drawing on its 'ancient flavor of antifashion' (365). Furthermore, leading up to and following the Romantic era, black accrued connotations of the sinister and satanic. As Hollander argues, '[b]lack appears as the color suitable to delicious forbidden practice and belief - the courting of death, not the mourning of it - in a great deal of Romantic literature' (376).

The powerful symbolism invoked by black attire, its ability to isolate and draw attention to its wearer as well as its ability to conjure 'fear of the blind darkness of night and the eternal darkness of death' (Hollander, 1993: 365) makes it a particularly appealing colour to the women fans who are drawing on this symbolism. As Karen puts it:

fashion trends, fine you can keep them. Because that is not me. I am always in black. It's a strong colour, people look at it as a very negative colour, but it isn't, black will stop negativity. Anything light or bright will attract negativity 'cause it is bright. It is a welcoming colour, ...[but] Black keeps people at a distance, it gives people the image of you know, 'don't approach me, back off, leave me alone'. I'm not the sort of quite little mouse that sits in a corner. I will not tolerate any one trying to invade or to put me down (64).

This fan is drawing positively on black's ominous symbolism and it is clear that a link is being made between self perception (black 'is me'), the perception of others ('black keeps people at a distance from me') and sartorial behaviour. This woman is using black to say to *others* 'I am different', 'I am unapproachable' and 'I am strong'.

While the women's self presentation is intended to 'stand out' as different, it is a particular kind of 'standing out'. By appropriating vampiric images they are presenting themselves specifically as 'outsiders' and expect others to recognise the symbolism. As Hollander notes, there are different ways of wearing black. Black has expressed

bourgeois respectability, a professional demeanour, and mourning. It can also mock these connotations through exaggerated display. In the latter half of the nineteenth century it was considered the suitable colour for those of 'straightened means' (Hollander, 1993: 379); the shop girl, clerk and domestic servant. But simultaneously, Hollander argues, 'rich and idle men were considered properly dressed in black in the evening, and rich and idle women properly dressed in black for ostentatious mourning or, suitably décolleté, for occasional dramatic evenings' (379). In the twentieth century, black has taken on a variety of symbolic connotations; indeed Hollander argues that in the late twentieth century black has lost its symbolic significance, 'through the fragmentation and multiplicity of styles in dress' and 'chiefly through the self-consciousness of fashion' (388). For Hollander, to wear black today is to 'refer to a variety of earlier manifestations of black clothes - earlier styles, former meanings, obsolete conventions' (388).

The women vampire fans adorn themselves in a black that harks back to the 'former meanings' of the Romantic era. They emphasise the sinister drama of black through the use of 'antique' and out-of-fashion clothing styles, worn in silks and velvets which many combine with dyed black or blonde hair, and sometimes the donning of dental caps fashioned as vampire fangs and yellow contact lenses. The intention is to 'stand out', to adopt an aloof stance. But the vampiric symbolism is also intended to startle and shock in its difference. As Karen comments about wearing fangs:

so, you walk into a pub, you sit down, you order a drink and you sort of look around and you smile at someone and it's just a look of shock, of disbelief as if to say 'I know what I'm seeing doesn't exist', but it still doesn't stop them from backing away [...], so I feel better with them in, well I'm quite a confident person anyway, but again it gives me the upper hand because it keeps people at a very safe distance (38 – 40).

This sense of being remote and startlingly different echoes the connotations of black attire worn by the Romantic man. As Hollander argues, the Romantic man wore black to establish his remoteness. It was a style with strong literary connections which marked him out as a 'fatal man'. For Hollander, the fatal man was 'specifically connected with spiritual unrest and personal solitude', in league with 'a dark power that exempted him from the responsibilities of common feeling and experience' (375). The vampire fans too want to display their 'outsiderdom' and draw sartorial inspiration from the vampire as Romantic outsider. Yet, as was argued in the previous chapters, the women do not view the vampire as the wicked villain depicted in numerous adaptations of *Dracula*.

Instead they look to the vampires in Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles* who offer a contemporary reinterpretation of the vampire as a sympathetic eighteenth and nineteenth century Romantic hero; one who suffers his isolation from humanity with the pathos more appropriate to the heroine of the gothic novel than its black-clad villain. Black keeps its demonic edge in the women's sartorial schemes, but it signifies the pathos of outsiderdom as well as its force, evidenced in the women's comments about 'not fitting in' and feeling a 'misfit'.

Black as revolt

Added to the Romantic implications of black-as-difference are those of black-as-revolt. Elizabeth Wilson (1985), in her analysis of fashion, has suggested that black has long been the appropriate colour of 'revolt'. This is because it is the 'colour of bourgeois sobriety, but subverted, perverted, gone kinky' (189). For Wilson, '[b]lack is dramatic and plays to the gallery, as the costuming of revolt must always do' (189). But more specifically, Wilson proposes that it was the Romantics and dandies, influenced by the revolutionary upheavals in the latter half of the eighteenth century, that actually inaugurated the notion of dress as revolt. She argues that it was the 'combined influence of the dandies and the Romantics that made of black a resonant statement of dissent' (186). While Hollander suggests that black has long signified 'antifashion', Wilson argues that it was actually the style invented by the dandies that led to conventional menswear and thus to 'antifashion' (183). Furthermore, Wilson argues that style of the dandy led in another direction; it 'contained the germs of something utterly different, of oppositional style' (184). Wilson suggests that oppositional style aims to express 'views hostile to the conformist majority' (184) and because of its conditions of emergence, oppositional dress was always 'above all *anti-bourgeois*' (183).

This notion of black-as-revolt chimes with the women's accounts of their sartorial identities as non-conformist. Black not only affords the women fans the means to stand out as 'different', they are also drawing on its oppositional connotations of sartorial revolt. Karen sums up the views expressed by many of the fans:

it just makes people think. They see me in black, they see the fangs, they see the contact lenses [...] They say you can't fight the system or buck the system, well yeah you can, but in your own way, and you do it in such a [...] way that people don't realise that you're actually being a little revolutionary in your own way (44).

The attitudes expressed by the women in their choice of black as declaring their difference could be interpreted as a sign of the women producing elitist distinctions between themselves and 'normal' people (Thornton, 1995). Alternatively, we could interpret their accounts as the proto-political act of subverting mainstream society (Jenkins, 1992). However, Wilson offers an alternative explanation. Wilson argues that while black has been a sign of 'anti-bourgeois revolt' (186) it has also been a deeply contradictory sign, 'as contradictory as the society that gave it birth' (183). Just as this 'transitory epoch of capitalism' (183) was an era poised between the extension of democracy and the politics of reaction, so too did the style of revolt appeal equally to the 'republican radical' and 'the reactionary, the disaffected aristocrat' (182). Thus it was of both past and future. Baudelaire, for example, wore black in protest against the 'sartorial vulgarity of French bohemian circles' (1985: 183). In fact, Baudelaire seems to express the contradictory impulses of the dandy. For Baudelaire the dandy was a disenchanted 'rebel' who celebrated 'decadence', but he was also one who 'attempts to create a new aristocracy of genius, or at least of talent' (183). Nevertheless for Wilson, this oppositional dress, whether looking to past or future was always 'anti-bourgeois' and she reminds us that capitalism is '*permanently* transitory' (183), and condemned to perpetual change, it repeatedly throws up 'ambiguous rebels whose rebellion is never a revolution, but instead a reaffirmation of Self' (183).

The women vampire fans can be seen as latter day versions of Wilson's 'ambiguous rebels'. For the women, the appropriation of black attire is to do with a non-conformity which is centrally about the construction and affirmation of 'self'. It is also significant that the women look to the past for sartorial inspiration and look precisely to the (Romantic) period in history that Wilson defines as producing the contradictory germs of oppositional style. The women vampire fans are drawing on the idea of black as a rebellious colour but conceive of the styles of the past contradictorily as both 'more feminine' than today as well as offering them nonconformity with femininity. So Pam, who comments that 'pink' (as the standard colour of femininity) is 'not for her' and wants her sartorial identity to say 'look, I'm different' also comments:

I don't think women look feminine now-a-days. I think the velvets and the satins and the laces of the past look so feminine. It emphasises you as a woman, I think, more (533).

Here there is a simultaneous sense of not fitting in to the norms of femininity (expressed in a rejection of pink and preference for black) which nevertheless continues to embrace

notions of femininity by looking to the past for sartorial inspiration. This seems explicable in terms of Wilson's formulation of the contradictory character of oppositional dress. Wilson emphasises the notion that the conditions that give rise to oppositional style are ambiguous, and that, as a response to those conditions, oppositional style is itself filled with contradictions. The experience of the paradox of femininity that frames the women's choice of black can lead to ambiguities in their sense of what being 'different' means. Wilson has highlighted how sartorial revolt is simultaneously a mode of past and future; that the impulses for nonconformity in dress can appeal to those looking to the past while also drawing those who desire the potential of the future. The following section will propose that for the women vampire fans, the past/future impulses of oppositional dress are simultaneous. Rather than looking to past or future, the women vampire fans are looking in both directions at once.

The dialectics of past and future

The implication of a preferable and 'emphasised' femininity in historical dress may be conceived of as a form of regressive nostalgia for the past. But this is complicated by the ambiguity of the vampire figure with whom the women travel. The Romantic connotations of the vampiric that the women draw on are those of 'otherness' in past as well as present, which proleptises any simple notion of their looking to the past for a better way of life. The vampire simultaneously symbolises the pathos and power of outsiderdom. It is a figure which expresses, as Richard Dyer comments, 'the despicable as well as the defiant, the shameful as well as the unashamed, the loathing of oddness as well as pride in it' (1988; 11). It is through vampiric modes of the past that the women express ambivalence about femininity and self. The vampire offers a way for the women to conceive of their identities as both 'not' feminine and 'more' feminine, and it also leads to the women questioning the very boundaries of gender and the associated sexualities. It is significant that most of the fans favour the vampires of Anne Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*, particularly Louis, Lestat and Armand. The homo-eroticism which infuses the relationship of these male vampires is widely recognized (Auerbach, 1995; Dyer, 1988; Gelder, 1994; Hodges and Doane, 1991) and does not go unnoticed by these women fans. For instance Janet comments about Louis and Lestat:

I don't think they're so male or female looking. I think they sort of cross both lines don't they [...] aren't vampires bisexual anyway? So it doesn't matter that I'd be a skinny little vampire with no bosoms (372).

This comment articulates the many issues of ‘self’, gender and sexuality raised by the vampire, for the women. The idea that having ‘no bosoms’ as her vampire self ‘doesn’t matter’ echoes the notion of not ‘fitting in’ to femininity and expresses the duality raised by Dyer above, an uneasy recognition of difference which converts to pride. But this conversion is at least partly possible through engagement with the vampire’s bisexuality – it’s crossing both lines. The women comment positively on the love between the (same sex) vampires and approve of their androgynous looks. Pam says:

Armand loves Louis if you read the books through, he really loved him but they also had women. He was quite happy to go chomping around but he loved Louis maybe in another sense but well he loved him more than anything in one way. So I think they are quite happy in whichever (373).

Later Janet comments:

I’ve watched that film [*Interview With The Vampire*] with men and men don’t like it. They don’t like the part with Armand and Louis, it puts men off, and I think so many men are like that, whereas women [...] It doesn’t bother us does it? That love women have for each other. Why should it bother men you know, why should it, if men love men, why should it bother men that much? It’s not affecting men but they just can’t hack it can they? (382 – 384)

Some post-Freudian theorists have suggested that the vampire signals an end to gender distinctions. For Craft (1990) and Case (1991) the vampire is a subversive border-line figure which problematises representation and destabilises the boundaries of gender. For Case, the vampire ‘disrupts’ because it exists between the boundaries through which we conceive of ‘being’; the ‘bi-polarities that enclose the heterosexual notion of being’ are punctured and ‘new forms of being, or beings, are imagined through desire’ (Case, 1991: 4). For Craft, it is the vampire’s mouth that poses the vampire as a multi-gendered being by displacing sexuality onto this ungendered space. Craft’s vampire exposes the insubstantiality of gender barriers; it ‘exists to dissolve opposites’ (109). Both Case and Craft then, pose the vampire as symbolic of ways of ‘being’ beyond what they consider to be unstable gender distinctions. From this perspective the women’s self-presentation as vampiric combined with their articulation of the vampire’s bisexuality would suggest that through sartorial means, the women are producing subversive identities beyond the constructs of gender. However, this position cannot take into account the women look to the past as a time when clothes for women were

more feminine. This suggests that they accept gender differences despite their own difficult experiences of contemporary feminine dress.

Other theorists warn against analyses of the vampire that prematurely pose the end of stable gender categories. Hodges and Doane (1991), as discussed previously for example, argue that the fictional blurring of gender categories found in the texts of Anne Rice actually mask a deeper acceptance of difference with its oppressive construction of woman. Analysing the women's comments from this perspective would suggest that the fans' identification with the 'line crossing' of the vampire is a deeply conservative fantasy to mask their deeper acceptance of the precarious place of the feminine in the symbolic order. However, neither the celebrations of the vampire as subversive of gender representations nor the claims to the contrary capture its duality and equivocal status in culture, nor the ambivalence in women fans' articulation of their appropriation of this symbol in their construction of self.

The women read the vampire as crossing the lines of gender and blurring the boundaries of heterosexuality and they draw sartorial inspiration from what is (at least nominally) a male figure of the past to express their own desire for the future acceptability of androgyny. Yet the past to which they are looking and drawing sartorial inspiration, is one in which women are conceived of as more feminine in dress. However, alongside these attitudes, the women's repeated emphasis on not fitting into present feminine norms and *wanting* not to, suggests that they consider the unwanted boundaries of gender to be in place. This complex blend of attitudes, expressed in dress, cannot be accounted for by the either/ or explanations discussed above. Walter Benjamin offers an alternative way of understanding these contradictions, ambivalence and ambiguities.

The vampire as 'wish image'

Benjamin contributes the concept of 'wish image' to the discussion of the modern consciousness, noting the tendency to 'thirst for the past' (Benjamin in Buck-Morss, 1991: 110) to symbolise a reality that has not yet come into being. According to Benjamin, the 'not-yet' of the new is expressed in archaic symbols rather than in the new forms 'commensurate with it' (114). Wish images then, express the desire for the not-yet by 'intermingling the old with the new in fantastic ways' (115). The imagination looks to the past to express the new because of the fetters of the present; the potential of the new is constrained by still-existing social relations and so wish images 'reach back to

a more distant past in order to *break from* conventional forms' (Buck-Morss, 1991: 116). For Benjamin 'every epoch dreams the one that follows it' (Benjamin in Buck-Morss, 1991: 114), but because a dream is not yet knowledge of a new reality, dream wishes take on the symbols of the past. Buck-Morss comments that Benjamin's evocation of the wish image is not utopian. She comments that 'Benjamin was reluctant to rest revolutionary hope directly on imagination's capacity to anticipate the not-yet-existing' (Buck-Morss, 1991: 114) because a wish image is interpreted through the 'material objects in which it found expression' (115). The material through which the women fans' identity construction finds expression are the garments of self presentation and their wish image a strangely gloomy figure from the past. The wish image cannot dream the future, rather it dreams desire for the not-yet. The women fans' 'not-yet' is one of personal emancipation from the paradoxical parameters of femininity and the potential for a more androgynous, less rigidly gendered way of being. This finds expression in past modes of dress inspired by their interpretation of both the (male) Romantic vampire and the feminine cuts of the past. But it has been argued throughout this chapter that women experience themselves in the context of femininity, and while they are not immobilised by this context, neither can they step outside it. Thus their desire for the potential of a new way of being is contained in the inescapable present; they desire something different but (like any member of society) cannot anticipate it, for as Benjamin argues, we 'stand in the darkness of the lived moment' (Benjamin in Buck-Morss 1991: 114).

If it is the case, as Benjamin proposes, that the wish image must look to the past to dream the future because the imagination is limited by the present, this may explain why the women look to the Romantic past for their modes of sartorial rebellion and why they simultaneously continue to hold to a feminine self-definition while raising the desire for a potential beyond this. If none can transcend the horizons of the present in imagining things not-as-they-are, then as Buck-Morss asks 'where else *but* to the dead past can imagination turn in order to conceptualise a world that is not-yet'? (Buck-Morss, 1991: 124) The vampire women are aware, despite their construction of self as 'vampiric', that the vampire raises desires and potentials rather than realities. None of these women believe that they 'are' vampires and this recognition is evidenced in comments which illustrate their rueful distance from the vampire rather than identity with it. The women have not achieved the desired state:

Dee: it would be just the perfect life style, it really would, [...] you could live a life that you had always wanted to (366).

Karen: I'd love it [to be a vampire] yeah, I'd love it. You could do what you wanted to do, nobody could oppose you, you'd be very dextrous... you'd work under the shadow of darkness, you know. Who'd miss the sunlight, who'd miss the day? (89)

Janet: We could have lived that life quite happily...And back in where they live, that would suit us to a tee. We could live there (600).

Pam: They don't have to bother with the rigmarole and the palaver that us humans have to go through sometimes. I'd love to dispense with it all and just have none of it. It would be ideal wouldn't it? (327).

The vampire offers a way of imagining the past for the women which poses potential, not realization; a desire for a different way of being, not its fulfilment. The women clearly feel that the vampire offers an alternative possibility to 'the way things are' which casts a particular light on their passion for the past. The past is a mode of engaging with present desires about self and trying out alternative possibilities of self by the creation of vampiric sartorial identities through which they can stand out as different to current normative definitions of self for women. The vampire is an appropriate symbol for these women who want to 'be' different both because of the experience of not 'fitting in' and the desire for alternative ways of being in the world. The vampire's duality captures these impulses; the pathos of 'not fitting in', of being an outsider, a desire for alternatives tinged with a recognition of non-fulfilment.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to demonstrate that dressing the part of the vampire for the women fans is a complex means of self expression. By drawing on the dualistic connotations of the vampire as Romantic rebel and pathos steeped outsider, the women are 'rebellious' and they are testing out possibilities of self in a manner which recognises non-fulfilment. The women's desire for alternative ways of being takes expression in their appropriation of black and vampiric attire as a means of producing nonconformist identities through oppositional dress. It has been suggested that this manner of rebellion is as contradictory as the context that produced its impulse; both rejecting and retaining ideas of femininity, looking to the past to imagine the future, expressing the pain of outsiderdom and the strength of non-conformity. These contradictions stem from the inability of the self to transcend the constraints of the present while still being able to

imagine things not-as-they-are. The women vampire fans are not fixed by the framework of femininity but neither can they simply step outside of social context and thus their desire for potential identities outside of this context are akin to the vampire with whom they engage; they are desires that do not die but neither do they live. The following chapter will examine fan vampire writing as another mode of expressing ambivalence; in this case the fans are investigating, through writing the vampire, issues to do with the physical body and transcending that body. The chapter will also examine the limits the fans experience in their writing, both self-imposed and enforced by others in the fandom. Through out this chapter there has been an emphasis on the women's sartorial practices as a response to cultural dilemmas, rather than seeing the women as outside of the cultural set up. An examination of the women's writing practices in the next chapter will demonstrate that this aspect of fandom too is affected by cultural discourses, as well as the unequal distribution of cultural capital.

CHAPTER EIGHT: WOMEN WRITING THE VAMPIRE: BODIES AND BOUNDARIES

Introduction

The previous chapter examined an embodied aspect of vampire fandom; dressing one's body as part of a process of identity construction. Dressing has long been considered a feminine preoccupation, as has the close association of the female with embodiment (Price and Shildrick, 1999; Spelman, 1982; Jordanova, 1999). That the women fans use dress itself to rebel against wider cultural associations made between femininity and dress points to what Nick Couldry (2000) terms the 'constitutive' conditions of culture in a recent 're-imaging' of the relationship between social forces and the production of the 'self' (51). He argues that we must recognise that 'individuals' relations to the highly structured cultural environment in which they live are *not* simple' (50) otherwise 'we cannot even begin to understand what sort of process culture is' (128).

Participation in vampire fan culture is certainly not simple. It is not a matter of a single practice and vampire fandom for women is not only a matter of dressing the part. Women vampire fans are also engaged in writing practices and this chapter will address the fan practices of writing and rewriting the vampire. The practices of dressing and writing are presented in separate chapters not because I want to privilege one over the other, nor because I want to reassert the mind/body dualism which is said to characterise Western culture. Indeed it will be argued that the abstract separation of the mind from the body is particularly undermined in the women's fan fiction because of the way that the fans conceive of the relationship between the vampire's mental processes and its physical body transformation. Much fan fiction has, for instance, concentrated on the moment the vampire transforms from organic human matter into immortal, preternatural matter and describes in detail the sensations the fictional vampire experiences. However, it will also be suggested that just as other areas of the women's fandom demonstrate contradictory impulses, there is an ambivalence about the body which surfaces in the many comments about the ability of vampires to transcend the human, organic and decaying body on the one hand, and the fascination with vampiric physicality on the other. This will be examined in relation to feminist theories of the body.

The women's vampire writing also cannot be categorised simply. They engage in a variety of writing practices which occur in different 'spaces'. For example, although the

ARVLFC newsletter is printed on paper, and Shirin produces two independent vampire journals, much of the fan writing from the American women takes place on the Internet. The Internet is theorised as a 'space' (Haraway, 1991; Clynes and Klines, 1995; Mitchell, 1999) in the way that writing in more traditional way is not, hence the celebratory claims about 'connectivity' and 'space/time' compression (Mitchell, 1999) and the potentially liberating nature (Baym, 1998; Plant, 2000; Turkle, 1998) of this new space. This chapter will examine the fan accounts of fan fiction in cyberspace and the possibilities that were opened up for fans who have the skills and access to participate in this arena. However, I will also argue that privileging these imaginative 'spaces' over the imaginative 'spaces' of those fans without Internet access (photocopied newsletters and journals sent through the post) is a reinscription of social inequality.

Furthermore, the way the fans describe themselves as rebels in the context of dress is not echoed in their accounts of writing. Instead, this form of creativity seems, for this group of fans, to be strongly marked by differences in class and education. The evidence from women vampire fans in Britain and New Orleans, it will be argued, contradicts accounts from fan theorists that writing in fandom takes place in an egalitarian and 'nurturing atmosphere' (Jenkins, 1992: 159). Instead, there is a hierarchy of value at work in the field of fan writing which mirrors traditional cultural capital. 'Original' fiction and poetry are more highly regarded than speculative fiction which is more highly regarded than reviews, horoscopes and word games. The 'level' of writing engaged in is very much a matter of an individual fan's level of personal confidence which seems to correlate directly to class and educational background. Thus the modes of creativity open to the women fans in terms of their writing practises are not equal.

This chapter will therefore examine both the creativity of the writing of female vampire fans and how impositions are experienced by, in particular, working class fans. It will begin by discussing the mind/body dualism which has traditionally devalued the body and then designated this the place of femininity. The chapter will then discuss how the fan fiction engages in and unsettles this dualism in an examination of the fans' accounts of their attitude towards the vampire and the body. The chapter will then move on to discuss the claims made by theorists of cyberspace and compare them to the accounts offered by the fans who sometimes inhabit cyberspace as part of their fandom. The chapter will finish by examining who feels at liberty to write what and where. This section will examine both the lack of self confidence that stops some fans from writing fan fiction in favour of forms of writing they deem more appropriate to their skills, as

well as the impositions from some fanzines, newsletters and journals which stipulate who can write and about what.

The vampire and the mind/body dualism:

The abstract separation of mind and body in Western thinking has been an ongoing area of scrutiny for feminism. Margrit Shildrick and Janet Price for instance, have argued that the body became the unspoken of Western theory because of the emphasis on pure thought in Western Enlightenment thinking. Thus they argue that ‘the post-Cartesian modernist period is marked by a rejection of the body as an obstacle to pure rational thought. As such, the body occupies the place of the excluded other, and can be dismissed from consideration altogether’ (1999: 2). Two decades before, Elizabeth Spelman argued that the whole ‘Western philosophical tradition has not been noted for its celebrations of the body, and that women’s nature and women’s lives have long been associated with the body and bodily functions’ (1999: 33, orig. pub. 1982). Jordanova takes up this theme in discussing women’s perceived role in nature in the period of the enlightenment; ‘[w]omen, being endowed with less reason than men, indeed with less need for reason since their social lives required of them feeling and not thought, were more easily dominated by extreme emotions’ (1999: 166).

The identification of a mind/body dualism which devalues the body and associates the body with the female has produced a variety of feminist responses, but as Price and Shildrick suggest, this has led to the development of ‘incompatible theories’ (1999: 1). The differences between feminisms are considered to be differences between second wave feminists and postmodern and poststructuralist feminists. Barrett and Phillips consider the changes in feminist theory from the 1970s to the 1990s to ‘be of the order of a “paradigm shift”’. (1992: 2) But they also argue that the early period should not be considered a kind of underdeveloped ‘prehistory’, ‘for many of the issues posed in that period return to haunt the present’ (2). The body may be considered as one such issue. For instance, Shulamith Firestone (1979) and Donna Haraway (1991), despite considerable differences, share a notion of transcending the body, and figures as different as Mary Daly (1973) and Luce Irigaray (1985) share gynocentrism. Gatens’ summary of the central ways that feminism has handled the issue of the body points to the body transcended/body celebrated paradigm. She suggests that feminists have either argued for the ‘transcendence’ of the body’s limitations or ‘the affirmation and celebrations of women’s bodies and their capacity to recreate and nurture’ (1992: 129). Gatens suggests

that these positions share the mind/body dualism because of their acceptance that there is a biological entity different to cultural definitions of gender. But Gatens argues that the body and how we think about it are integrated. She argues the 'human body is always a signified body and as such cannot be understood as a "neutral object" upon which science may construct "true" discourses. The human body and its history presuppose each other' (132). Similarly, Butler's contention that gender is performance suggests that sex 'is not a simple fact or static condition of a body, but a process whereby regulatory norms materialize "sex" and achieve this materialisation through a forcible reiteration of those norms' (1993: 236).

Second wave feminism, in its rejection of biological determinism, and subsequent division of 'biological' sex from 'cultural' gender, has been critically characterised as reinscribing the mind/ body dualism and of considering female bodies to be 'troublesome bodies' (Shildrick and Price, 1999: 4). Indeed Price and Shildrick define Shulamith Firestone's position as 'somatophobia' and they write, 'Firestone [...] looked forward with optimism to a time when the then incipient advanced reproductive technologies might free a woman from the "oppressive 'natural' conditions" of procreation' (4). Yet the women vampire fans share with this strand of second wave feminism an equivocal relation to the body and a desire to transcend the limits of the body, which at least for some is connected to reproduction. For instance when I asked Karen to tell me why and how she wrote her female vampire characters, she discusses the vampire's transformation in terms of the pain of childbirth and the pleasure of the female vampire on discovering that she has moved beyond the human body and its pain:

it is it is it is everything that I would imagine that I would go through because you have got to put yourself in either one of the roles, I mean it would be excruciating pain. I can draw on the feeling of what it would be like to have the flesh severed and penetrated ... because I have experienced that, so I know the pain factor that is involved in that when I had [my daughter]... very very hard how you are gasping for breath and how your heart is beating so fast that you can't breathe I have experienced that, I have been under quite a few major operations so going under anaesthetic, that kind of in-between here and there, I know how that feels (233).

Then later she describes the fledgling vampire's first moments in her new body:

As soon as it enters her stomach [blood] that is when the metamorphosis takes hold. It is changing her blood structure and is changing her body so what she has always had inside, that has now been vomited out. She [...] it is the most intense fear she is

ever gonna feel, after the fear there comes a calm - a peace - no more pain, ever. Everything is vital, eyesight, hearing, everything takes on a totally different vision and then [...] this new life she has been given ... immortality (235).

This description of her story concentrates on the physical aspects of transformation, so while she demonstrates a fascination with moving beyond the limits of the body ('vomiting out' the old and 'no more pain, ever') there is a continued emphasis on physical sensation.

Many of the fans echo these sentiments about the lure of immortality and share the idea that their own body is, at times, a hindrance. Both Dee and Karen complain about being 'fat' after the birth of their children and Pam and Janet complain about being 'skinny'. Pam comments about the human 'palaver and rigmarole' that would end if one could really become a vampire. Andrea, who nursed her mother through her final months of cancer, herself suffers from severe asthma. She explains that this has caused clinical death a number of times, from which she has needed medical resuscitation. When I asked her how she first 'got into vampires', she responds thus:

I went to my mother and took care of her until she died, in California [...] I died one more time. At that time the doctors in California that had been treating me told me that um I was not going to live past twenty-five. [...] Well being you know, that young, I was just like horrified and I had just watched my mother die, uh, in between this period and made a conscious decision that well damn it, if I'm going to die before I'm twenty five I'm gonna live first (35).

Andrea explains that this 'kind of ties in with the whole vampire theme' and the idea of immortality. If she has already been dead, as she sees it, then who else but the figure of the undead to adopt to start living?

The fans' desire to transcend their physical bodies could be seen as problematic by feminists who celebrate female embodiment or who consider such desires somatophobic. From this perspective, the fans' desire for transcendence would be considered to stem from an acceptance of the view of the female body as distortion, and perhaps from deep seated desire to disavow sexual difference. But, as was argued in the previous chapter, the impossible and contradictory standards for the female body can help explain women's own ambivalent feelings. In addition, the critiques of the 'transcendence paradigm' do not seem to address the question of pain which is at the forefront of these

fan accounts of their own body or bodies close to them (Andrea's mother, for example) as the motivation for an interest in moving beyond those experiences.

Feminists such as Gatens and Butler, would in different ways, suggest that this misses the point that embodiment itself is discursive. Butler argues that nature (of which the body is a part) 'is construed as that which is also without value; moreover it assumes its value at the same time that it assumes its social character, that is, at the same time that nature relinquishes itself as natural' (1999: 238).³⁵ Butler's perspective would seem to suggest that the women fans' experience of different forms of pain, their articulation of that pain and their appropriation of the figure to the vampire to imagine a 'beyond', takes place in and through a history of discourses about feminine pain. If this is the case, then I would like to suggest that second wave feminism has added to this discourse two 'norms' popularly available for women to make sense of 'womanly' pain such as childbirth. The first is to celebrate these physical experiences as a natural part of womanhood (which seem to differ little from traditional ideas about women). The second comes from that feminist position which insisted that women should not be defined through our biology and that celebrated the transcendent possibilities of science, the ability to control fertility and to control pain. So, despite the theoretical problems that may arise from splitting sex and gender, second wave feminism contributed to public discourse the means for women to move beyond those ideas (with the weight of Western thinking behind them) which insisted that woman was a function of her body. The vampire fans seem to be drawing on these now widely accepted ideas in their fictional explorations of body transcendence and are thus putting them to work in the context of today's vampire in popular culture.

However, at the same time as conceiving of the immortality of the vampire as a kind of bodily transcendence, the fans are also deeply fascinated by the physicality of the vampire, its pleasures and its pains. This becomes clear in the way the fans write the vampire. There is a constant concentration on the body and its transformations, on physical death followed by sensuality, on heightened physical perceptions and what the newly fledged vampire *thinks* about what it is experiencing. The fans regularly write about the process of vampiric transformation. One fan, who was too shy to meet me in person, sent me a dozen poems and stories about vampiric transformations. Karen and Lea have both written vampire transformation stories, as have Melinda and Hannah. Karen summarises this impulse when she describes one of her own stories:

I wrote [...]about the birth of a vampire how somebody has actually turned from mortal into a vampire, the agony that she goes through. It is the typical stereotype male vampire/female mortal and it is how he embraces her and the sensation she feels when his fangs penetrate the flesh in the neck how her heart is beating so fast it is thundering in her head as if it is going to burst out of her chest how she slips into everything that is silent, how her body goes into spasms and how she is violently vomiting as the human mortal life is being sucked out of her as being inwardly as everything inwardly is dying and being exhumed from the body. How the skin is turning from warm pink flesh to cold marble-like flesh how the () comes around on her how she *knows* she is dead - in silence, still she can hear her heart beating. How he wakes her and still holding her in his arms when she has to decide to feed from him, how she can see with her vampire eyes [...] How she can see differently through vampire eyes with a vampire eyesight, how everything is louder how she takes her first breathe as a living corpse, bewilderment at her newly born vampire body, basically that is the essence of a new born [...] Fear, bewilderment, excitement, it really is a cocktail. She knows she is dying, she is trying so desperately to hold onto life and she knows that she can't because she knows she is dying, she is torn between - will she live or won't she? She knows that the only way she can live is to accept blood, to drink blood is immortal and horribly wrong (230 - 232).³⁶

What is striking about this fan's description of her fiction, and the transformation stories of many of the fans, is the lingering detail on visceral and painful physical death which precedes the entry into vampirism. This is a fictional body which, in its transformations, breaches the body's boundaries. This could be interpreted as the women fans writing the vampire as an abject body (Creed, 1993; Douglas, 1984; Kristeva, 1982). The human body, in many of the transformation stories, has been penetrated and then it vomits out *all* of what is human inside. In turn, it penetrates in its own 'feeding' (blood drinking), thus destabilising the notion of inside and outside the body, it blurs that boundary. Both Douglas and Kristeva have argued that societies mobilize the body in their classification systems and through ritual set up demarcation lines between the human and the non human. For Douglas, cultural anxieties about borders and boundaries lead to the establishment of bodily rituals particularly involving ideas of pollution and purity. (1970). Barbara Creed (1993) applying Kristeva's theory of abjection to a variety of horror texts and characters, argues that the 'concept of a border is central to the construction of the monstrous in the horror film' (11). For Creed, the vampire is abject because 'the act of vampirism mixes the idea of blood/semen/milk' and [...] the vampire's union is brought about by the opening up of a wound' (70). Creed argues that

‘[w]ith its repeated emphasis on marking the skin, opening up a wound, the vampire narrative points continually to the imperfection of the body and the particularly abject nature of the maternal body’ (71). The maternal body has particularly been considered to be abject, leaky, transgressive and confusing the border between outside and in. It is interesting therefore how the descriptions this fan produces of her vampire’s moment of transformation parallels her descriptions of childbirth. Her descriptions, though, do not demonstrate unease with these border transgressions since they are necessary integral parts of becoming anew. The abjection of the vampire for these fans is not anxiety inducing, nor frightening. It is through this abjection that the human grows into the preternatural figure which is the site for the fan explorations about alternative ways of being. This is not a quest for disembodiment but another kind of embodiment and, at the heart of it, is an acknowledgement of the pain of the leaky body as well as its future pleasures. However, just as chapter five argued that the Gothic images the fans draw on complicate the pristine utopianism academics often associate with the imaginative universes of science fiction (Penley, C, Lyon, E., Spigal, L. and Bergstrom, J., 1991; Jenkins, 1992; Bacon-Smith, 1992) the fan writing is dualistic in depicting the vampire. The vampiric transformation takes the character into an ambivalent space; it is idealized (the freedom and physical powers) at the same time as being pierced with despair and death.

This rewritten vampire, similarly, is not Haraway’s optimist cyborg metaphor, where leaky bodies are the basis of a new ontology and feminist politics, but is perhaps her underbelly. Haraway’s cyborg points to future potentials but the vampire points to alternatives and their non-fulfilment simultaneously (cf. Punter, 1980). Haraway argues that the ‘cyborg is a kind of disassembled and reassembled, postmodern collective and personal self’ (2000: 55). ‘No objects, spaces, or bodies are sacred in themselves; any component can be interfaced with any other if the proper [...] code can be constructed’ (55) and Haraway exhorts feminists to do this coding. Writing the vampire for the fans, however, is not about new ontological mergings, creating new beings. Haraway seems to be posing a feminist figure not rooted in individualism and the centrality of ‘I’. Yet for the fans, the figure of the vampire is centrally about selfhood, the vampire a potent symbol of individualism. Nevertheless, in its own way the fan fiction is grappling with the same issues of ‘being’ and embodiment that has long concerned feminism. The vampire figure of the fans’ writing is an imaginative and creative examination on the

parts of the women, of different ways that a body might be inhabited and felt. The transcendence paradigm perhaps loses somatophobic edge in the context of the physicality of the vampire stories the fans write. They are exploring questions of embodiment not at odds with feminist explorations of the body, but are using those discourses available to them, the transcendence paradigm. Some of the fans, however, have taken the vampire into cyberspace and the following section will examine their accounts of re-writing the vampire in that space.

Vampires in cyberspace

Alt.books>Anne-Rice is a non-moderated newsgroup on the Internet where vampire fans meet to discuss the latest news about Anne Rice publications, and where fans write single-authored and co-authored speculative stories about the characters from Rice's *Vampire Chronicles*; sometimes the fans also start role playing games based on Rice's characters and characters from the 'real' world. Two key figures in this newsgroup were interviewed for this project, Melinda and Hannah. This section will thus examine their accounts of vampires in cyberspace in relation to contemporary theories about cyberspace.

Much of the literature on cyberspace (Mitchell, 1999; Plant 2000) is as celebratory in its claims as the academic literature on fandom, indeed a significant part of the literature is about the possibilities offered by on-line fandoms (Baym, 1998; Turkle, 1998). Sherry Turkle for example, in discussing on-line, text-based computer games such as the *Star Trek* game 'Trek Muse', argues that in cyberspace 'we can talk, exchange ideas, and assume personae of our own creation' (6) This is taking place in the context of 'eroding boundaries between the real and the virtual, the animate and the inanimate, the unitary and the multiple self' (6). This sense of the Internet providing new spaces in which to explore identity is partly echoed in Melinda and Hannah's own accounts of cyberspace. In fact, Melinda and Hannah met and fell in love with each other in cyberspace through a speculative role playing game based on the vampire characters from the *Vampire Chronicles*. Both women describe themselves as having been heterosexual prior to their encounter on the Internet and one was married to a man. The two met in the flesh and decided to move from opposite ends of the country to live with each other in New Orleans ('vampire Mecca') and had a wedding (although, not endorsed by the state). It is not possible to determine whether the Internet was instrumental to their shifting sexuality but Melinda and Hannah indicate that it was very important. During Hannah's interview

(which Melinda attended) the two began discussing their romance. Here is how they describe their meeting;

Melinda: As I say, I still trace it back to the game personally. Well the way we were playing the game is that, you know, I mean that was...before we started actually talking to each other, we would be up most nights just passing email posts back and forth on the game, and the characters we were playing were engaged and romantically inclined and going to get married and...you know, it started getting kind of hot and heavy on the scenes, and we decided we clicked really well, and who proposed to whom?

Hannah: I proposed to her -

Melinda: You see, what happened...I'll get even more specific, [...] this was Hollywood Vampires, about right in the middle of it, I had taken on Armand [...] She was playing Marius, who I hated. [...] Well, she played him so beautifully, so sympathetically that I started seeing a tremendous amount of her in the character. So finally...when you play these games, don't misunderstand, it's not - I post one post in the vacuum and they all respond to it, and then somebody else posts a post through a vacuum and everybody else responds. We plan out each one of these steps, so for every post that you see in these games, you've got at least ten or twenty emails behind the scenes saying "okay, now what are you going to do and how are we going to react and how are we going to write this, and how are we gonna deal with this". What's coming next, so there's a tremendous amount of work behind the scene planning [...] and the preplanning that took to create this story, to make it a beautiful piece of work, that's how we got to know each other

Hannah: I remember one night in particular. She quoted one poem and I recognised it, because it was on a tape that I have. So I'm like, oh I recognise that, so without telling her I recognised it, I ran and got the tape and wrote out another one of the poems from it and sent it to her. And she's like oh this can't be quite happening, so she wrote out another one to me, and I'm just like, I don't know what that's from. We started...that was when we actually started talking to each other about, you know, what we like, what we didn't like, and all this sort of stuff and actually getting to know each other. We found out we had a lot of similarities. [...] and it was always going simultaneously because we had just written this amazingly hot and heavy scene between Armand and Marius, and we also had a precedent. [...] L[...] and S[...] announced that they were going to get married. And they like, you know, wrote a little spec about it and tossed it out there, you know, and they sort of now refer to each other as Mrs L[...] and Mrs S[...], you know, [...] so...that's where we got the idea from, kind of, you know there was a precedent out there of a married couple who wrote together and so one of us proposed to the other one. It happened almost simultaneously. I thought she did it, or vice versa. Something like that. So there's this wild night of passionate writing, poems flying back and forth and finally finding a

soulmate [...] And that was the culmination, is that we proposed to each other, except that at the time it was still hypothetical. I didn't know precisely how you could get married, but I remember when I woke up the next morning, I was feeling a case of the nerves. But I remember how I felt and I felt so astounding about it all and I wrote back to her immediately, going "what did we do, and how did you feel"? And she wrote back immediately saying to me "this is the first morning that I could face going to work with a smile on my face and joy in my heart, and this is what you've done to me. Regardless of what happened, this is what comes of it" [...] that's how it all came about (Hannah's transcript, 90 - 94).³⁷

This extensive exchange demonstrates the complex blend of writing vampires together on the Internet, and shows how playing with homoerotic desire between fictional characters has allowed them to develop a romantic cyber-relationship that carries into the rest of their lives. For Hannah it is clearly important that other women in their Internet group had 'set a precedent'. There is very little written about finding love in cyberspace. However, in a recent study of couples who met on the Internet, Andrea Baker suggests that couples meet 'through particularized, rather than general places online' (1999)³⁸. Furthermore, she suggests that physical attraction takes second place to 'intellectual and emotional compatibility' adding that, 'with these couples, the knowing of the "inner person" occurs before the revelation of the outer shell' (1999). These observations seem to ring true in the relationship between Hannah and Melinda. The emphasis in the exchange above is on sharing intellectual pursuits (poetry) and practices (writing) as well as emotional compatibility. Thus the practices of vampire fandom in that space that is called 'cyberspace' enabled the connections and explorations of identity which opened up possibilities about sexual identity and self.

These two women and the others in their writing circle refer to each other as 'cybersisters' and 'cyberfamily' and have found on the Internet an alternative community to traditional family ties. S and L were just about to join Melinda and Hannah in New Orleans where the four were still living together as two couples in 2000. However, the idea and practice of such alternative living arrangements existed long before the Internet and those who argue that it is the changes wrought by the Internet per se that have developed alternatives, are quite one-sided in their view of technology. Sadie Plant, for instance, proposes that virtual worlds 'undermine both the world-view and the material reality of two thousand years of patriarchal control' (2000: 265) and that in spite of itself 'patriarchy is subsumed by the processes that served it so well' (269). She maintains that

‘[i]t takes an irresponsible feminism - which may not be feminism at all - to trace the inhuman paths on which woman begins to assemble herself as the cracks and crazes now emerging across the once smooth face of patriarchal order [...] [s]he is in process, turned on with the machines’ (274). Plant’s highly contentious claim that ‘patriarchy is the precondition of all other forms of ownership and control, the model of every exercise of power, and the basis of all subjection’ (276) however, is as incredible as her claim that such a power has never before revealed cracks or that logging on to one’s computer is the mode of overturning such power.

The hyperbolic celebrations of the subversive potential of cyberspace made by cyberfeminists such as Plant is exceeded only by the radical claims made by (white, male, western) apologists for new technology (Mitchell, 1999; Clynes and Klines, 1995). In a recent damning critique of Internet euphoria, Robins and Webster (1999) join an avalanche of academic voices now critiquing such versions of the on-line community. (Coyne, 1999; Gonzales, 2000; Morley, 2000; Lykke, 2000; Balsamo, 2000). For Robins and Webster, the community on the Internet is part of modernity’s desire to hide alterity and banish difference. Commenting upon the predominantly male, white, middle-class American inhabitant of cyberspace, they argue that ‘cyberspace, with its myriad of little consensual communities, is a place where you will go in order to find confirmation and endorsement of your identity’ (249). For Robins and Webster this ‘new virtual space is a pacified space’ (239) because ‘virtual culture is driven by the desire to suppress the complexities, difficulties and divisions that characterise real geographies’ (239). Furthermore they argue that technoculture seeks to ‘revalidate Rousseau’s ideal of social transparency in which “persons cease to be other, opaque, not understood, and instead become mutually sympathetic, understanding one another as they understand themselves”’ (244). For Robins and Webster, the Internet optimists are saying that ‘new technologies now make it possible to be in a space where we may enjoy the kind of social intercourse that the real world has always denied to us (on the basis of connectivity - being in touch through interest and affinity rather than the accident of geographical location)’ (240).

It is certainly the case that Melinda and the other members of what they call the Dagger Crew have found a small ‘consensual community’ based on mutual interest and affinity. Melinda explains:

we met from all over the world, and one of the Dagger Crew actually lives in Sweden. But we all met on the Internet, we all

got together, we all found a common interest, we all found a common talent, and we said “cool, let’s go”. So we all have our own web pages, we all are very deeply into this as far the characters, [...] these characters speak to us. [...] You know, there’s a concept and there’s a core in there that is very romantic and very appealing, and these concepts are alive. These...the nerves that they touch within the human heart gives them a certain life. [...]. So that’s what captured us and drove us forward (29).

Robins and Webster’s critique of both the theories of cyberspace and cyberspace itself, while providing a much needed unpacking of the ‘e-topia’ claims of writers such as Mitchell, seems to be unable to account for these women’s experiences on-line. This is because they are ignoring crucial questions of subordination linked to (among other issues) gender and sexuality. They write that ‘[e]ncounters with others should not be about confirmation but about transformation’, but such a statement is only easily made from a position of privilege, of those who have not endured enforced ‘transformation’, (cf. Massey 1994) and whose identities are confirmed rather than hidden by wider culture. In the case of these women, finding ‘confirmation’ of their identity in their on-line community is less about hiding differences, and more about finding support and friendship circles that allow their identities as lesbian women to emerge. What is interesting though, (and at odds with much of the literature about on-line communities), is that, for these women, finding a family and a home in cyberspace did not curtail their desire for close physical proximity to their new family. The space/time compression, so lauded by theorists of cyberspace as recreating new geographies, was not enough for these women who wanted to be together physically as well. Melinda explains:

we all travelled to New Orleans independently, thinking we’d all hate each other, because whenever you meet somebody off the Internet, you always hate them, even though you really, really like them on the net, you hate them in person, and when we all left, it was one of the most traumatic things in our lives. We all scattered back...Connecticut, Ohio, Washington, Denver...we all went back to the four corners of America, and it was one of the worst days of our entire lives. And we decided right there and then we had to be together. We all shared a vision (210).

The desire to belong and to be together, to have a ‘home’ together on the part of these fans demonstrates the extent to which visions of new virtual geographies have been hyperbolic. Morley (2000), in a recent analysis of concept of home in the current media age, suggests that while new communication technologies are producing new definitions of community, they are not erasing, but rather ‘overlaying’ older understandings. It is not, he argues, the case that physical space no longer matters; ‘[i]t is rather a question of

how physical and symbolic networks become entwined around each other' (176). These fans' symbolic networks on-line have indeed become inextricably bound up with their sense of home and place.

This examination of the lesbian community set up by these fans via the Internet does not indicate that cyberspace has inaugurated a new era of identity subversion as suggested by Haraway and Plant. In fact, Robins and Webster's argument that cyberspace is inhabited by a privileged minority is supported by Morley who suggests that 'the space of the Internet is in fact more socially homogenous than that of the physical world, because those who have access to it have already been selected by ethnicity, nationality, class and gender' (187: 2000). Melinda and Hannah share some, but not all, of privileges by which access to the Internet is selected. Both are university educated Americans and Hannah has formal computer training and works as a network engineer at the Tulane University Hospital in New Orleans. Dana, who was my key e-mail contact in the US and spends 'fan' time in cyberspace also has a university education and access to the Internet via work. In fact there seemed to be a strong link between a university education and Internet use among the fans that I met in New Orleans. In Britain, Internet use was not as widespread as the US but again of the minority of fans who used the Internet, all were university educated. Levels of education also seem to factor highly in terms of the type of writing that the women fans engage in. The following section will examine the various modes of writing and the limitations imposed and experienced by fan writers.

Writing boundaries

Chapter two examined the celebratory claims about fan fiction made by theorists of fandom (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Gillilan, 1998). Jenkins characterises fan writing as inclusive, encouraging, participatory and non-elitist, 'writing becomes a social activity for these fans, functioning simultaneously as a form of personal expression and as a source of collective identity (part of what it means to be a fan)' (155: 1992). Fans stretch the boundaries of texts 'to incorporate their concerns, remoulding its characters to better suit their desires' (156). At one level, Jenkins' description is accurate. Melinda and Hannah take great pride in infringing copyright when they re-write Anne Rice's vampires. Melinda says:

The specs. are something that Anne hates. I'll tell you right now, she hates them, because she's very possessive about her characters, and would prefer that others not write about them. But it's done anyway, so give it up, and there's no way you can control this. The only author I know that ever tried to stop it was (), and not only did she get a singularly negative reputation amongst the Internet fans, but as far as I know, the stories within her world are going as strong as ever, in fact redoubled, simply as a backlash, and now they're just underground. You know, all you have to do is ask, "oh where do I get this"? They say "here's my private little archive that nobody knows about, and there's all the stories", so you can't stop it (9).

In this sense the fans are 'poaching' Rice's characters and re-writing them to suit themselves. But that is not all there is to speculative stories. There is a very firm etiquette about writing which Melinda explained to me. One fan is not allowed to take up the threads of another spec. writer's story without permission, killing off favourite characters is forbidden, and taking over a character that another fan has already claimed is not acceptable. Hannah describes the 'flamewars' that have erupted on Alt.books>Anne-Rice as a result of just such breaches of protocol. Jenkins' notion of 'poaching' then, does not extend to the fans' endeavours. Melinda had written a series of letters between two of the vampires which she posted on the site. I asked her about this issue:

Milly: But how would you feel if somebody else from wherever, London or something, wrote extra letters (48)?

Melinda: Yeah, you see, I'd go crazy (49)!

Milly: Would you really (50)?

Melinda: Yes. Exactly, I'm such a hypocrite. I don't deny it in the slightest. But what we try and do, we try to be very polite. The characters are not exclusive, but once you begin a story, unless you ask the author to jump in on that particular story, you can't do it. Write your own story with the same characters, the same set, the same concept, do whatever you like. Just don't jump in on this story (51).

Rather than fan writing on the Internet being a space where 'anything goes', it seems that that computing norms have emerged which do not constitute a 'radically new discursive space' (MacDonald, 1998: 133).

Furthermore, these 'norms' do not only take place in Internet fandom. For instance, the VP of the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club (ARVLFC) told me in conversation that their newsletter does not publish fictional pieces from fans, only letters. An examination of the newsletter reveals that the content is almost entirely dedicated to the publishing activities of Rice herself, or else is about activities promoted by the 'officially

endorsed' ARVLFC. In Britain, Dee and Karen comment on the way that fanzine editors systematically reject material that they deem unsuitable or not up to standard. When I asked Dee if she sent fictional stories to a particular fanzine, she replied in the negative and explained:

Well, simply because they reject...I mean, I thought about writing something for them, and then they reject all such things like comedy horoscopes, [...] I have a friend who sent them some stories but ... they rejected her stuff and also when the Dracula Society, they were gonna do a book for the Centenary, but they didn't get enough interest, and they wanted people to send in stories. And she sent some of her stories, but she'd noticed it in the Vampyre Society booklet. It said you could send them to them, and because she'd had more dealings with them, she sent her stories to them, who didn't pass them on to the Dracula Society (54).

This account paints an entirely different picture to Jenkins' picture of a 'nurturing atmosphere', with editors who 'take pride in their receptiveness to new contributors' and his claim that 'anyone who wants to can probably get published within fandom'. (159). In fact, Constance Penley (1991) discusses the tension of competing impulses that *Star Trek* editors face. Editors are 'torn' between 'professionalism' and 'acceptance'. Such an observation seems to support the suggestion made in Chapter Two that fandoms are influenced by the discourses of legitimisation circulating around the two antagonistic dominant poles in the field of cultural production. This issue will be examined in greater detail in the following chapter which concentrates on fan club organizations.

But it isn't only the constraints of fan publishing which are a barrier to publishing fan fiction. It is also bound up with one's self-confidence as a writer, which again seems to be related to class background and educational level. Dee, who left school with very few qualifications, worked in a hairdresser before she had her children and she is now a full-time single parent. Her level of confidence in her abilities and her general level of humility contrasts sharply with the confidence which university educated fan writers exude. When I asked her if now writes vampire fictions she replies, 'No, I don't write stories because I'm bad at it' (66). She explains that:

book reviews. I used to be able to do them, I just used to pick up a book and review it, but then when they started sending them me, I didn't...some books are hard to do it with. And then I'm thinking 'at the end of the day, it's only my opinion. I think it's crap, but what if I get caught out', because I can't actually write reviews. So what if somebody realises, [...] I couldn't bear them to say 'we

can't use this, it's crap'. I'm sure they wouldn't say that, they'd just say it's not suitable for this month's issue or something (70).

Here, she is clearly being encouraged by the fanzine to do more reviews, but her confidence in her own abilities stops her from writing. She does not possess in educational terms 'official' cultural capital and fandom does not provide her with the means of acquiring alternative cultural capital. When Jenkins characterizes fan fiction for women as 'an alternative source of status' and writes, '[w]omen who have low prestige jobs or who are homemakers can gain national and even international recognition as fan writers and artists' (159) he ignores the very stark ways that the unequal distribution of cultural capital can effect self esteem. It may be the case that some women gain confidence through writing fan fiction, but it is not axiomatic of fandom as this fan's comments demonstrate. Furthermore, Jenkins' week-end utopia ignores the way that one's life outside fandom can impact on fan activity. Dee made these comments in the context of discussing a number of difficulties mainly financial, (as a single mum she had limited income), and emotional (one of her sons was very ill). She told me:

now, it takes me sometimes three hours to write [...], but I used to do two an hour, now I couldn't do half in that time, because my mind's on other things. Because my house is falling down, the roof needs doing, my kitchen needs doing, and there's something wrong with my son, [...] I just...I am a great worrier (30).

Furthermore, fan fiction is not only an 'alternative' source of status. Would-be professional writers use fan fiction as a training ground. Even if this does not entirely motivate some to write fan fiction, it is certainly clear that the national and international recognition as a fan writer is seen by some as a very useful strategy for breaking into professional writing. Melinda who wants her work to be published, sees fan fiction thus:

I'm writing my first serious novel. And you see, fan fiction isn't exclusive to Anne Rice by any means. When I first ran into fan fiction it was to another fandom entirely [...] And one of the authors that I particularly admired was just brilliant, and she wrote her own fan fiction, and you see when you do this, you can sell it, but only for cost, and so you print it up and you sell it for the cost of the printing. You can't make a profit off of it, no problem. But it gets your name out there and it establishes you as you, but I have the talent, I have the conviction to complete a novel. I have what it takes (33).

The author mentioned by Melinda did 'break in' to publishing and had her novel published, providing Melinda with the inspiration that she could do the same. There is

nothing wrong with using fan fiction as a way to practice professional writing, for getting feedback and for establishing a reputation. The point is not to castigate Melinda. The point rather is that although Jenkins recognises that fan publishing has ‘represented an important training ground for professional writers and editors’ (47), he says little more about it, or the way that it contradicts his model of fandom by demonstrating that fans do participate in the official world of authorial meaning. This fan is using fan fiction as a way of entering the ‘official’ world of publishing as a professional author. It seems to me to be a rather positive side to fanzine culture, that aspiring authors have a resource to help them ‘break into’ what is often an exclusive world. But it does not subvert mainstream culture.

Conclusion

Writing the vampire for these women fans is a complex cultural practice involving processes that are often at odds with each other. Fan fiction is a creative means of exploring issues to do with body boundaries, transformation and selfhood. Yet while fans are blurring boundaries in their fiction, other boundaries are erected. The validity to designate who can write what and for whom, invested in fanzine editors is not part of a fan culture project of subverting mainstream conventions of cultural production, but rather seems to be influenced by the ideas of cultural production in a quest for, as Bourdieu puts it, ‘distinction’. Furthermore, fan culture does not necessarily offer alternative forms of cultural capital denied to subordinate groups, but rather the lack of cultural capital experienced by some fans is carried into the arena of fandom and limits their participation. The following chapter will pursue the notion that fan culture does not exist outside of the conventional field of cultural production. It will draw on Bourdieu’s analysis of the structure and dynamics of the field of cultural production to examine the practices of two vampire fan clubs to suggest that the clubs themselves police the boundaries of fandom.

CHAPTER NINE: VAMPIRE FANDOM IN THE FIELD OF CULTURAL PRODUCTION

Introduction

This thesis has thus far examined the reading strategies of women vampire fans, and the particular practices of vampire fandom, and has discussed the rebellious and contradictory character of sartorial habits as well as the creative explorations of ‘self’ found in not only dressing, but also writing the vampire. This chapter will now examine the structure of vampire fandom in terms of the operations of fan networks and fan clubs. Most studies of fandom (Bacon-Smith, 1992; Jenkins, 1992; Penley, 1992) focus on the particular practices of the fan cultures under investigation (such as writing slash fiction), rather than analyzing the way that fan clubs operate. For instance, although Jenkins talks about conventions being ‘fan-run and fan-centred’ and suggests that such ‘institutions are the infrastructure for a self-sufficient fan culture’ (1992: 47), he offers little else by way of analysis of these institutions, preferring to concentrate on fan fiction, art, music and other activities such as gossip and criticism. I have argued (Chapter Two) that the lack of examination of club networks and the tensions between them arises from a shared acceptance among fan theorists (who deploy some of Bourdieu’s concepts rather selectively) that fandom is set in opposition to a notion of ‘the mainstream’, a concept regularly employed but inadequately theorized. I have drawn on Bourdieu’s analysis of the conflict between two dominant groups in the field of cultural production to propose that the cultural field is not a monolithic homogenous mainstream, but is a field of struggles in which the distribution of capitals (economic and aesthetic) is unequal.

This chapter will continue to use Bourdieu’s analysis of the cultural field to discuss vampire fandom as it exists in clubs and societies and will propose that vampire fan culture does not conform to the definitions of fandom offered by Jenkins (1992) nor those suggested by Fiske’s ‘cultural economy’ of fandom (1992). It will be suggested that, just as there is no single ‘mainstream’ which fans can be said to be resisting (but instead two groups who inhabit the dominant pole of culture with their conflicting ideas of cultural worth), vampire fandom is not operating outside ‘the mainstream’, but is influenced by the ideas and practices of the two antagonistic groups who vie with each other to dominate the values of cultural worth. It will be proposed that the influence of these conflicting sets of principles can be found in the differing attitudes that fans have towards fan clubs and organisations, the objects of fandom and each other. It will also

be suggested that the permanent conflict between these two sets of positions means that the cultural field is a space of contestation over meaning and value which spills out of the arenas populated by those rich in capital (economic and cultural) and into the cultural formations of those at the dominated end of the field. This ensures that while vampire fandom is heavily influenced by one or other sets of values and ideas, it is not 'fixed' by meanings that are imposed from above. The difference between the two sets of principles and corresponding ideas (which is the dynamic of the cultural field) ensures that neither position monolithically dominates discourses about cultural value. According to Bourdieu, new positions emerge in the context of this permanent conflict which transforms the space of possible positions within the field of culture. But Bourdieu argues that this is usually the result of the impact of changes in the wider fields of power and politics.³⁹ While his own examples come from the cultural changes influenced by revolutionary turmoil, less momentous events may be seen to have an impact in the cultural field, disturbing the existing space of possible positions.

Bourdieu's analysis of the field of cultural production concentrates on the struggles between the 'consecrated' (38) and non-consecrated avant-garde because he wants to emphasise that notions of universal artistic beauty and 'pure' aesthetics are the result of the specific history of the development of the artistic and literary field. For this reason he has less to say about the positions adopted by these social agents at the dominated end of the field of cultural production, except for his discussion of the working class audience who are said to enthuse in Manichaeian style identifications of good defeating evil in order to refuse being refused access to the pleasures of culture. Bourdieu perhaps simplifies the reading practices of the subordinate because he sets himself the task of analyzing the structure of positions and position-takings at the dominant poles of the field in order to demonstrate how our cultural hierarchy has come to be. Like any theoretical model, abstraction is utilized in order to isolate key features of the phenomena under scrutiny and thus there are examples of cultural phenomena that contradict some of Bourdieu's statements, one example coming from the feminist research on the popular audiences for soap opera who engage in the reading practices of critical distance as much as emotional proximity and where identification is not encouraged in a single 'good' character fighting 'evil', but across a range of flawed characters (cf. Ang, 1992; Hobson, 1982, Geraghty, 1991). However, applying Bourdieu's model to the concrete practices of fandom offers a way of making sense of characteristic struggles between fan groupings that are missing in the most influential

theories of fandom. Unlike other theories of fandom (Fiske, 1992; Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998) this chapter will not suggest that fans are akin to ‘ordinary audiences’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998)⁴⁰, but through the influence of the principles of legitimacy that circulate at the dominant pole of the field, (even if the fans are often excluded from the possession of actual capitals through which dominance is maintained) fans are both active participants in the cultural field and subject to its laws. This chapter will thus apply Bourdieu’s analysis of the structure of positions and position-taking to a cultural formation at the dominated end of the field of cultural production, vampire fandom. Furthermore, it is not being proposed, as does Fiske, (1992) that Bourdieu’s analysis of working class reading strategies can be applied to fans⁴¹. Instead I would like to follow through the suggestion made in Chapter Two, that fans are influenced by either set of the antagonist ideas that circulate at the dominant pole of the field, but that must also circulate more widely in order to achieve dominance. Based on the accounts offered from the women vampire fans and numerous discussions with fan club personnel, as well as my own observation of club practices, it will be suggested that there is a split between ‘official vampire fandom’ and ‘unofficial vampire fandom’ which is explicable through competing values as outlined in Bourdieu’s model. I will suggest that fan clubs and societies constitute what shall be termed ‘official fandom’ and are influenced by the ideas at the dominant pole; some fan clubs adhere more to the economic principles that emanate from the dominant end of the dominant pole and some adhere to the autonomous ideas of the dominated end of the dominant pole which, rather than ‘art-for-arts-sake’, may be understood as ‘fandom-for-fandom’s-sake’.

Bourdieu argues that the direction of artistic movements is dependent upon ‘the system of possibilities [...] that is offered by history and that determines what is possible and impossible at a given moment within a particular field’ (1993: 183). I will suggest that this applies also to fan culture where there are specific spaces of possible positions to adopt for those wishing to enter the fandom, and which delimit the practices of the fandom, depending on which of the dominant set of values influence the particular fan organization. This chapter will therefore compare the British-based London Vampire Group (LVG) with the American-based Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club (ARVLFC) to show how each fan club enters and produces a space of possible positions to do with the particular emergence of each club, which leads one towards economic principles and the other towards autonomy. I will demonstrate the importance of key position-takers in these fandoms for establishing the positions that other fans find as the space of possibles

on their entry into the fandom. I will demonstrate then the conflict of attitudes between the official fans who police the fandom in various ways and the unofficial fans whose expectations of vampire fandom were at odds with their encounters with the fandom, resulting in disillusionment and cancelled memberships. I will suggest that the space of possible positions open to fans was often one that many fans were not prepared to adopt and this led fans to retreat from the fandom and set up smaller networks elsewhere rather than struggle against such organizations.

The previous chapter discussed the role of fanzine editors in the selection and exclusion of contributions to fanzines, and showed how the holding of these positions allows editors to designate legitimate fan interests and also legitimate their own positions then as arbiters of fan 'taste'. This chapter will extend this analysis by addressing the different positions that delimit the field of fandom and designate what is considered to be the appropriate *modus operandi* of fans. The chapter will begin with an examination of the different attitude of vampire fans in New Orleans towards the ARVLFC. It will then examine the role of Rice herself and her company Kith and Kin in the development of official vampire fandom in New Orleans and will move on to discuss the economic values at work in this fan club. The principle of hierarchization (which Bourdieu suggests is key element of the cultural field) will be shown to be in operation by those jockeying for position in vampire fandom. The majority of this chapter will concentrate on the struggles in the vampire fandom of New Orleans not only because it was very pronounced, but also because its stark nature highlights the structure of conflict in fan culture which I have argued has been theoretically underplayed.

This chapter will then move on to discuss the differing attitudes of British fans towards the LVG which adopts a stance more in line with the autonomous pole. It will be suggested that a key event which led to the establishment of this club (a nasty episode with the Vampyre Society) has heightened their 'fandom-for-fandom's-sake' tendency and commitment (at least for the moment) to co-operation with other vampire clubs. But it also demonstrates that the struggles in fan culture are not simply to be found between those who differ in their cultural values, but between those who share the autonomous disposition. Furthermore, my own observation of club gatherings revealed that the club was not immune from the cultural distinctions in wider culture, for there was very much in evidence an inner and outer circle.

Part One: Official and Unofficial Vampire Fandom in New Orleans

The Memnoch Ball

The examination of fan attitudes towards fandom in New Orleans begins with a discussion of the Memnoch Ball for a variety of reasons. The ARVLFC, unlike other fan clubs, has no regular activities. The only event hosted by the club is the annual ‘Gathering of the Coven of ARVLFC’. Usually, the ball is held in a local night-club called Tipitina’s, but in October 1995 Anne Rice took over the organization of the Ball and hosted it in St. Elizabeth’s Orphanage in the Garden District of New Orleans. The ball’s title came from Rice’s fourth *Vampire Chronicle*, *Memnoch The Devil* (1995). The venue, Saint Elizabeth’s Orphanage, is the setting for significant action in the novel and is owned by Anne Rice. This ball was a very big event in the calendar of vampire fandom and it was anticipated with great excitement, some fans working on their costumes for most of the preceding twelve months. The attitudes of unofficial fans (who are not club personnel or aspiring club personnel) demonstrate their expectations of fandom and the frustration of those expectations. For instance, Melinda comments:

I went to the Memnoch Ball but I was so terribly disappointed I stayed 20 minutes and I left. You've seen how big Saint Elizabeth's is, but it has the capacity for 4000 people, there were 7000 people there that night [...] The spirit of the books or the spirit that drives me or rather draws me, was so utterly lacking. [...] The spirit was gone, there was nothing that I recognised from her books or wanted to be a part of...it was a lot of people getting drunk and it was very cold...as I understand it there were 4000 people who paid for tickets and 3000 people who were invited guests and they were treated so much better than the people who actually paid and stood in the line...and the victim beer? No! And Anne and all of her 3000 invited guests up on a pedestal? No! This is my world...she should have paid more attention to the fans [...] If you were not one of the elite ... they had little passes for the elevator and stuff like that so they could go up and down quickly as opposed to the rest of the unwashed, we had to climb the stairs and things of that nature. Didn't need that at all, no. Caused a lot of resentment. I wasn't the only one to leave early. I was with a tremendous group who went early. I was with a tremendous group who said 'forget this, let's go'. We went, um, this really meant a lot to me, I had a gown commissioned ...working nine months on that costume and leaving after 20 minutes you had to do something, so I went to Bourbon Street and got drunk, boy did I get drunk. I was so depressed. And everyone cancelled their membership immediately (169-192)

Melinda's key criticism is centred on the disparity of treatment between the fans and the guests. The fans' 'available positions' as fans (that is, included, insider) was occupied by others. The fans' enjoyment and thus status in what is an already denigrated cultural field, is further denied by lack of inclusion in the special position as 'fan'. These sentiments were echoed by all of the 'unofficial' fans that I met in New Orleans. Both Andrea and Shirin thought the ball was horrible and say that they won't be going again. Andrea states:

it was something I started planning for in July, the problem is that, that one was horrible [...] they were the rudest crowd I've ever seen, they were very rude [...] usually it has been rather pleasant, but this one was horrible, I don't know if I'll go next year (403-410)

These accounts of The Memnoch Ball challenge Jenkins notion that fandom is 'utopian community' (1992: 280). Jenkins suggests that to occupy the position of a fan, one has accepted that one will be labelled as occupying a subordinate position in 'the cultural hierarchy' but that fan culture allows the fan to 'speak from a position of collective identity' (23). But in the case of vampire fandom in New Orleans, being a member of the fandom does not automatically confer a sense of collectivity or a shared identity. The unofficial fans felt badly treated and rather than have a common identity with the fan club, felt as if they were put in a subordinate position in the hierarchy of vampire fandom. Jenkins argues that fans often come up against big business, and that they struggle with the media institutions over meaning. For Jenkins, this is part of the resistant nature of fandom. However, he underplays the many instances when fandom is structured around a celebrity figure who is also the producer of the texts which fuel the fandom. For while he recognizes the 'worshipful deference to media producers' (24) of some fans, he only analyzes those who 'respond with hostility and anger against those who have the power' (24) and ignores the tensions between these two positions. Furthermore, when confronted with a fan club which is operating hierarchically, the unofficial fans do not fight, but withdraw, bitterly disappointed and attempt to re-establish a sense of common purpose and community elsewhere. But this leads to the formation of restricted networks in the case of these fans rather than expansive cultural communities suggested by Jenkins. For instance, Melinda having left the ARVLFC, joined a small Internet e-mail group consisting of a handful of fans.

The official fans, many of whom worked at the ball, had a very different approach. Diane, for instance, comments:

everything is growing so much, I mean these are just average people who volunteer their time to run this stuff, they're not professional, so, Anne kind of took over for Memnoch and she had it at Saint Elizabeth's Orphanage which has got 50.000 square feet and she spent several thousand dollars and opened up that house and let everyone come. There was about 4000 people there and she had dancers and she gave away... Mardis Gras beads and cups you know, there was entertainment, she gave out wine and beer free. Anne does things on a grand scale, we always laugh, don't just order one for her, order ten...and she had a local brewery brew this stuff called 'victim beer', you know the beer label, it was just a huge extravaganza (183).

Diane is the assistant manager of the Garden District Bookshop which has very close links with Anne Rice. For instance, the bookstore was the only outlet for tickets to The Memnoch Ball other than directly through the fan club. Both Diane and the other employee, Max, worked at the ball. The bookstore organizes book signing events for Anne Rice at the book store and occasionally in other venues. The employees from the bookstore go back and forth to Rice's residence with boxes of books to be signed, and to drop deliveries and so on. They also order specialist books for Rice, and will spend considerable time tracking books down to help Rice with her research. Diane comments on this close link:

I'm the assistant manager of the bookstore and what happens is we work very closely with Anne and she comes up with the ideas for the signing, she decides what she wants to do and where she wants to have it and then we kind of do what she wants to do, that's basically the thing. And so we work with the publisher and with Anne and then however we can set it up to where it's practical, you know we work very closely with her staff too, and we talk almost everyday, Anne's constantly () we're just kind of always right there and people call from all over – reporters - and we're just involved and it's fun (830).

Thus although Diane is an ordinary member of the fan club rather than officer, I have counted her part of the official set up because of her close links with the fan hierarchy due to her role in the bookstore. When I asked her if the ARVLFC was identified with the bookstore she responded 'oh yeah, because we're so close to her and a lot of the times it is the only way people can get in touch' (826). The differences between the attitudes of these officials and the 'ordinary' vampire fans is further revealed in their attitudes towards each other. The following section will examine these attitudes.

Vampire fans talking about each other

Bourdieu argues that the space of possible positions in each area of the field of cultural production exists prior to agents taking up those positions and that in adopting positions, agents are also demonstrating their predispositions; that is, revealing their 'habitus'. He argues that there is an 'extraordinary correspondence between the hierarchy of positions' and the 'associated dispositions' (189). The attitudes demonstrated by official fans towards ordinary fans reveal that part of the process of occupying the position of 'official fan' is adopting the correct, or associated disposition which is achieved by drawing distinctions between one's own practices, attitudes and positions and those of the ordinary fan. Diane, for instance, regales us with numerous stories of the 'ridiculous' behaviour of the fans. She says that the fans 'will take anything, they will take a leaf off a tree, they steal the dog's collars all the time [...] they'll ring the buzzer and say, "can I take a leaf off a tree?"' (150). Ordinary fans are characterised as undiscerning in their activities and overly invested in their fandom. Another example is Diana telling me a story about handing out colour coded cards at one of the book signing, to organize the fans:

and the day after it was over we threw them away and somebody came in and said they were selling these things on the Internet... and right here where we are sitting, we put the trash outside in boxes and sometimes her boxes come with her name on them, you know on the side - I was coming down here to use the bathroom and there was somebody with an Anne Rice box going through the trash at one of the tables and I said '*is that our trash?*'... they even come dressed up to the store, its like their on a pilgrimage (150 – 163).

A significant proportion of the interview with Diane involved similar anecdotes about fan behaviour. She distinguishes herself continuously from those fans who collect Anne Rice items indiscriminately. The language she employs is one of pathologization reminiscent of the newspaper item discussed in chapter two. She tells me 'they get themselves all whooped up on the Internet [...] that's how serious they are, like every single thing you say is being read by so many people and they think about it all the time and so you just have to be careful about what you say' (241 – 247). Despite the fact that Diane is a fan herself, her comments about ordinary fans are strikingly similar to the distinctions that Jensen proposes 'aficionados' make between themselves and fans. He argues that fans are 'believed to be obsessed with their objects, in love with celebrity figures' in contrast to the 'affinity' of the aficionado which is deemed to involve

‘rational evaluation, and is displayed in more measured ways’ (1992: 20). Diane seems to be drawing just such a distinction. Furthermore, Jensen suggests that it is ‘safe’ to be attached to ‘prestige-conferring objects’ and dangerous to be attached to ‘popular, mass mediated objects’ (20). But, there are ‘prestigious’ mass produced items in terms of commercial value, and it is these kinds of things that Diana collects. For example she collects pre-publication material and all of Rice's first editions and tries to get Rice to sign them to make them more valuable. She told me that a Rice first edition hard back from the Knopf publishers were worth \$100 - \$150 and that the first editions from the British publisher Chatto and Windus were worth even more. Diane told me that she therefore buys these books as an investment but she doesn't read them. She reads the cheap paper back copies and keeps that first editions in mint condition. Two of the official fan club officers also spoke of having Anne Rice sign first editions for them, but they ask her to leave their own names out of the inscription as it makes the volumes more valuable still. Diane confirms this:

Anne will sign, you know, she's very gracious. She will sign anything. Some authors are very particular about what they sign and she'll just sign anything. [...] Because I was laughing. I gave her a galley one time and I said ‘could you sign this for me’ and she said ‘did you want it personalised’ and I said ‘no just sign your name’ and she said ‘that makes it more valuable doesn't it?’ and I said ‘yeah, [laughter] just put your name so it'll be more valuable’. And you know we were both laughing about it [...] anything we get at the book store, that just booksellers get, you know, we always put aside. We always ask the sales reps to send us extra things for um ... they'll send us covers of books before the books are actually out (371).

Diane and other fan club personnel also told me of taking great pains in deciding which bits of memorabilia from the Coven Gatherings may become valuable and then collecting these items in as large quantities as possible. One fan had managed to ‘hang onto’ four cases of ‘Victim Beer’, and several plastic rats from the Memnoch Ball. These attitudes toward collecting demonstrate that the official fans are drawing a cultural distinction between themselves and the ‘ordinary’ fan who will simply ‘collect anything’. Furthermore, the official fans seem to be adopting values in line with the principles of the dominant heteronomous pole of the field and are using their official position to maximise the commercial worth of their items. The collecting habits of the unofficial fans seem to be more in-line with the autonomous values of cultural production. The

fans do not, in fact, collect 'just anything'. They are very selective about what they collect and see it as a form of preservation. Hannah comments:

the incredible thing about news-groups is that you put it out there and it stays there for a month and then it disappears... and the one thing I hate watching is a good piece of work disappear or go to waste...and I'd seen other people make archives of fan fiction out there and I thought, 'you know we really ought to do this because there is good work that people are putting out, out there' (40).

This notion that there is fan material 'worthy' of preservation contrast with the approach to the merchandising of the official ARVLFC. Both Hannah and Melinda thought that the plastic rats and the 'Victim Beer' collectibles from the Memnoch Ball were 'tacky' and not at all in keeping with the romance of the *Vampire Chronicles*. They too collect prestige items, but the basis of legitimacy for these items is at odds with the commercial imperatives of the heteronomous values of cultural production and in-tune with the autonomous principles. The disillusioned unofficial fans were less interested in collecting 'official' memorabilia and more concerned with collecting 'valuable' material produced by other fans, whether this take the form of 'specs.' or hand made items of clothing, as well as favourite films on video and books. The items collected were deemed to have aesthetic worth which did not translate into commercial value. Hannah comments that Rice 'has gone completely over to commercialism' while Melinda suggests that 'she would sell Lestat's sperm if she thought she could get away with it'. Melinda and Hannah are adopting the language of fandom-for fandom's-sake that shuns crass commercialism as the non-consecrated avant garde shun material success as evidence of selling out.

Furthermore, while the official fans have a tendency to pathologize ordinary fans, unofficial fans in New Orleans are quite clear in their dislike for the fan club hierarchy. They feel 'snubbed' and excluded as the following comments demonstrate:

Andrea: I joined the fan club really to get tickets to the ball, 'cause I tell you those people are none too friendly (824).

Shirin: At one point I was organising some meetings, but Anne Rice, you know, has grown so much in popularity here that everybody has got Anne Rice *on the brain* and the Anne Rice fan club got started and they've just like, stolen everybody away. And we attended a meeting or two and we were not impressed. They were just like, very cliquish. They just kept themselves to themselves, you know? (122 – 124)

Hannah: the fan club should be by the fans, for the fans, or 'of' the fans, for the fans and it's not, it really isn't (207).

Melinda: I disassociated myself with the group. I'm not currently associated with nor have knowledge of any one that is a member or would recommend it...this is clannish, this is cliquey on a grand scale, this is exclusivity to the point of paranoia and I honestly wish that it were different... these are your fans, these are the people you take care of, you know? I'll get off my high horse now (laughs). But they don't take it at all seriously, they figure, "we've got the product, we don't have to"...they have Anne, and they're the only ones who do, they've got the coven ball, they've got New Orleans - and well, (pause) I don't think they treat the fans well at all (130 – 138).

These comments demonstrate the frustration with the fan club. But it is not only that the fans feel excluded by the club (although that is certainly the case), there is in the comments a sense of being at odds with the commercial values (they've got 'the product') and also that the official fan club impinges on the activities of other fan (they've stolen everybody). The unofficial fans experience the ARVLFC in terms of the limits and the impositions that the fan club puts on their own fan practices. The following section will examine the way that the ARVLFC polices the boundaries of vampire fandom in New Orleans. It will be argued that rather than fan organisations unanimously operating as 'poachers' as suggested by Jenkins (1992), this fan organisation operates more like the gate keepers, conducting regular border controls to keep the poachers out of the grounds.

Official fans: gate keepers at the boundaries of fandom

Jenkins argues that fans come up against powerful producers and media organisations as a result of their fandom and this produces conflict that can threaten 'the pleasures that fans find in creating and circulating their own texts based on someone else's fictional "universe"' (1992: 32). He argues that the relationship between fan and producer is 'not always a happy one and is often charged with mutual suspicion, if not open conflict' (32) and this is based on the conflicting interests between producers (landowners) and fans (peasants/poachers). I would like to suggest that this binary producer/fan is too simplistic and flattens the more complicated terrain of fandom. In New Orleans, the open conflict is between the fan club and the fans rather than the fans and club together finding themselves up against a powerful media corporations. This becomes very clear

in Hannah's account of a series of 'flame wars' that broke out on Alt.books>Anne-Rice. Hannah, who is the 'keeper of the archives' of 'spec.' stories, describes how fan club members came on-line to try to stop the speculative stories. She comments that Random House (Rice's publisher) could 'slap' them with a 'cease and desist order', but they never had. Instead they wrote to congratulate her on her archive⁴². Furthermore, it was fan club personnel who tried to stop the 'specs' being posted according to Hannah:

the most notorious one, [flame war] [...] and there were like three of them directly in a row, started all by the same group of, you know, there were like five trolls and they just kept starting them over and over and over again, and you know, they actually were Anne fans. You know, they were Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club, but their protest was that it was Alt.books>Anne-Rice, and we should only be talking about Anne Rice and what the hell were the specs doing on here anyways. So they attacked the spec writers personally and [...] they kept bringing up the fact that "well, you're infringing on her copyright", you know, "it's unlawful, she could slap you with a lawsuit", you know, "you're all gonna get sued", and that's why we started printing the disclaimers at the top, "this is non-profit amateur fiction", you know, and "no infringement intended". And you know, that was where we actually started doing research into getting another newsgroup or listserv. or something to pull the specs off the newsgroup but to this date it hasn't happened. The specs are still there (185).

In the end, the fan club fans stopped posting to the newsgroup according to Hannah, because there was actually nothing they could do about the speculative story writing. Nevertheless, it dampened down the enthusiasm for the newsgroup for this group of fans who as a result of these flame wars set up an e-mail group called The Dagger Crew. Hannah explains how the newsgroup went from being a 'friendly place to hang around in' to being a nasty experience:

it was notorious as being one of the friendliest news-groups out there, because there's a lot of trouble with, you know, huge arguments going on in news-groups that are just really unpleasant and really nasty. And right around the time we came down the first time to New Orleans was when we had our first experience with that, and the newsgroup has gone down ever since. We suddenly got inundated with people who, you know, swore that they knew how to run it and everyone, you know, it's an unmoderated newsgroup. No one can tell you what you can or can't post, and suddenly there are all these people who thought they could and caused this huge fuss, you know, threatened to like slap legal action on the spec writers. You know, just everything else, and just nasty, nasty posts flying everywhere and everybody

was really upset and it just stopped being a good place to hang around in. I didn't like it very much (114 - 116).

Hannah's account of the fan club attitude is supported by my own discussions with fan club personnel. I was told a number of times by fan club personnel and book store fans that Anne Rice does not like fans writing about her characters and that others have 'no right' to write their own stories about them. But it is not only on the Internet newsgroup that fans feel the fan club bearing down on them. Shirin comments that she cannot get anything off of the ground because of the ARVLFC and Melinda explains that she had a law suit threat hanging over her head at the time of our interview which was worrying her. She explains:

way back when before we grew wise in the ways of lawyers () a group of friends and I got together and decided that we wanted to give tours about the works of Anne Rice, and we were fan club members and so we came together and started this...nearly two years ago, actually almost three years ago really [...] and we weren't in it for profit, you've got to understand. We wanted to organise this, so it didn't really start out as we're going to be a tourist company; it started out as "well damn it, somebody's gotta organise it, it might as well be us". [...] And so we tried and unfortunately we did run foul of business and lawyers, and without being able to say too much specifically about it.

Milly: Was it because somebody else...is it because Warner Brothers owns the characters?

Melinda: No, and if there was just you and me and a conversation, I could tell you a lot more, but unfortunately I can't name too many names because already there is the threat of law suits hanging over our heads, and it's...I wish I could, but they certainly do give us a new perspective on how certain companies and organisations are run, and we went into it very naively, certainly no way to deny that. We just thought that it would be fun. It would be fun, we wanted to meet people who thought like us and everybody who comes to New Orleans thinking of this as Mecca, this way they have a resource. We would be able to meet with them and show them and explore and share the joy that we found when we thought, "this is it, this is the final (), I can't believe it. Look, this is where they lived for sixty-five years"! You know, I mean, I've seen so many people do that, and it just gives me a kick every time I do it [...] So anyway, unfortunately...I don't know how to put this without getting too specific... I'm now not associated with the fan club as a direct fallout of what happened with the tours (120 - 123).

Melinda's implication is clear. As a member of the fan club, she and others set up non-profit making tours of the world of Rice's vampires and in some way the fan club was involved in shutting the tours down and (successfully) threatening Melinda with

legal action. What I did not know at the time was that while Warner Bros. retained the visual options for the first four *Vampire Chronicles*, the merchandising rights on the characters had recently reverted to Anne Rice. While it is impossible to check the facticity of Melinda's account, it is worth pointing out that later that year (1997) Anne Rice's family management company 'Kith and Kin' began their own tours of New Orleans: Anne Rice's Garden District Tour @\$30, Inside the World of Anne Rice @ \$98 and Anne Rice's Lost New Orleans @ \$48⁴³ (the cheapest ticket price being considerably higher than other local tour companies where the standard price for an hour long tour was \$20 in 1997). The implication of the unofficial fan accounts, that the ARVLFC act as 'gate keepers' in the kingdom of Rice, is supported by my own observation of the club and numerous conversations with fan club personnel. This challenges the over celebratory attitude to fan culture (Jenkins, 1992; Fiske, 1992) which presents fandom as flat and one dimensional in which participants share identical aims and in which fandom is always 'a space where a commitment to more democratic values may be renewed and fostered' (Jenkins, 1992: 282).

Furthermore, vampire fan culture in New Orleans undermines the suggestion made by John Fiske that fandom always operates as a 'shadow cultural economy' (1992: 30). His notion that fandom can be seen as 'a sort of "moonlighting" in the cultural rather than economic sphere' (33) makes little sense in the context of Melinda and Hannah's experiences of the fan club. Having examined the antagonistic attitudes between the official and unofficial vampire fans, the following section will discuss the fan club itself, its operations and structure and the attitudes displayed by official fans towards the club and towards the object of fandom Anne Rice.

Commercialism in vampire fan culture

Fiske argues that fan organisations 'begin to produce equivalents of the formal institutions of official culture' but under 'popular control' (1992: 33). It is on the basis of this perspective that Fiske sees fandom 'outside and often against official culture' expropriating and reworking 'certain values and characteristics of that official culture to which it is opposed' (34). The relationship of the ARVLFC to Rice and her commercial concerns, as well as the attitude towards the ordinary fans, demonstrates that this is not axiomatic of fan culture. Instead, what is significant about this fan club is the way that it is implicated in the 'official' commercial imperatives of Rice's expanding empire. It is

not under popular control, nor is it moonlighting in Rice's empire. Instead, it operates in line with the values at the dominant heteronomous pole of culture, which are in essence commercial. It has relinquished its autonomy as a club to such values and has benefited by subordinating the needs of fandom to those of Rice.

The ARVLFC is the only Anne Rice fan club officially endorsed by Anne Rice. Some of the founding members are now employed by Rice's company 'Kith and Kin'. The original president is now employed as Rice's personal assistant. The second president is employed as an assistant to one of Rice's key personnel and works in the offices in Rice's home. The current president (who was not a founding member) held the post of vice-president during my visit to New Orleans. His offices are in St. Elizabeth's Orphanage which is owned by Anne Rice. He was also hoping to be taken on as a paid employee. The fan club has a further nine staff, two of whom are related to the president. It seems then, that the title 'Kith and Kin' is rather apt. Further, both the fan club and Rice have very close links with The Garden District Book Shop and at least two of the employees are fan club members. Alongside the close collaborations with Rice's book signing events, this store is also used as a distribution centre for Rice publications as well as other merchandise from the fan club and is a ticket outlet for the fan clubs' annual event.

It is clear from this sketch that the fan club is very closely linked to Rice and depend upon her for resources and also that the 'official fans' are embroiled in the commercial aspects of the vampire fandom in New Orleans. This set up poses questions about Jenkins' proposition that fan culture is run by fans in an 'self-sufficient manner' (47) because fans do not possess the commercial means of production as well as Fiske's notion of fandom under popular control. Such a set up limits the space of possible positions that fans may adopt in official vampire fandom. The following section will discuss the way that the fan club's close association with Rice confines the potential positions that fans may adopt to ways of being useful to Rice.

The space of possible positions in the hierarchy of official vampire fandom

Bourdieu argues that in order to understand a sub-field of the field of cultural production (in his case, the 'artistic' or 'literary') one must set oneself the task of 'constructing the space of positions and the space of position-takings [prises de position] in which they are expressed' (1993: 30). What follows is an attempt to do such an analysis of positions in relation to official fandom in New Orleans. I will demonstrate

the relationship between the positions adopted by specific fans in official vampire fandom in New Orleans (found in operations of the ARVLFC) and the space of possible positions available to newcomers which is delimited by the actual position-takings.

The forms of fandom engaged in by the official fans are primarily to do with working *for* their object of fandom, Anne Rice. The emphasis is on being ‘helpful’ to Rice and showing that you will put yourself out for her, in order to achieve an ‘insider’ status which is denied to most fans. In other words, the space of positions is delimited to ‘useful functionary’ with the promise of a future position as ‘well regarded insider’. The evidence that the former position may transform into the latter is held out to the official fans in the person of the original president of the fan club who is now Rice’s personal assistant and who travels the world with her. The official fans are keen to establish both their usefulness to Rice and their level of ‘insider-hood’. For example Diane, who as has been established, positions the ordinary fans as ‘they’ seems to spend less time helping the fans and more time servicing Anne Rice. This is not limited to her role as the assistant bookshop manager. For instance she takes great delight in telling me of her role at the heart of disseminating information regarding Rice:

I had a girl call the other day that [...] She called from Canada on a pay phone [...] saying ‘I heard that something ... that Anne was sick or that she’s not doing well and something might happen to the next book and I just wanted to make sure that she was OK.’ And I said ‘I just talked to her she’s fine. The book has already been written. It’s gonna come out [...] it’s like ‘honey calm down’ you know, ‘I promise you the book has been finished it’s going to be out. Anne’s fine, you know’. [...] Anne had an MRI done. She had sinus problems and she just had an MRI so they could check everything out. And so she said ‘oh let’s make a T-shirt out of it’. [...] Course they made thousands — no hundreds. And they were very popular. Well it was on the Internet, you know, about the T-shirts. Well then this one girl came in [...] and she said ‘an MRI is so serious and it costs so much money and something’s really wrong with Anne and does she have a brain tumour. Does she’ — ‘no’, I said ‘let me’ — I said ‘wait a minute’. And I went in there and I called (Anne Rice’s personal assistant and fan club ex-president). I said, ‘Sue — you know all these people on the Internet are really worried’, I said, ‘what do you want me to say?’ I said, ‘What’s the official word so I can tell these people that it’s nothing’. And she said, ‘just tell them it was for sinuses’ (231 - 235).

It seems to me that through telling me this story, Diane is trying to establish herself in a number of ways; that her status is one of an ‘insider’ as evidenced by the fact that she spoke to ‘Anne’ the day of the first phone call, and that she can simply pick up the phone

and speak to Anne's personal assistant (she knew that I had written to this woman a number of times and had received no reply and was unable to contact her by phone). She also demonstrates her willingness to 'give the official line'; showing that she is part of the hierarchy and that she is trusted as such. In other words she occupies the 'useful to Anne' position at the same time as trying to position herself as 'well regarded insider'. It is also interesting that the commercial imperative surfaces in the middle of this account as it seemed to in all of my discussions with club personnel. Many fans would make a sarcastic joke about a celebrity in their fandom selling T-shirts printed with said celebrity's MRI scan, but not Diane.⁴⁴ The scorn for commercialism is the side of fandom that fan theorists concentrate on, but little attention is accorded to the more commercial approach of some to the fan culture they are involved in. Furthermore, there seems to be little acknowledgement in the versions of fandom offered by Jenkins (who suggests that the relationship between fan and producer can often be one of conflict) that popular writers like Rice are both the producers of the cultural products and the object of fandom. Diane completely accepts Rice's commercialism because the space of positions in this official fandom, offers one position she wants to occupy which necessitates accord with Rice's values. Throughout the interview Diane is keen to tell me stories about her interactions with Rice, both as helper and as friend. For instance she tells me how much time she spends tracking down books for 'Anne':

like for the *Servant of The Bones* she just rings me and says, 'get me everything there is on this or that' [...] and I can spend eight hours on the phone to like, Hasidic booksellers in New York finding out what there is [...] So I know, you know, I know what she ordered. I know what I found for her [...] She called one day and she said 'get me something on banking in Vienna'. Or she'll say 'get me picture books of opera houses'. And it — you know, so I know (770 - 772).

This official fan then attempts to establish her 'insider' status through anecdotes about Anne Rice. She also tells anecdotes and funny stories about herself in the 'world of Anne Rice'. For example she was telling us a story before the interview started, which Susie taped:

there was this guy going around [with a video camera] talking to people and he came to me at the very end and asked 'could you say something for Anne'... and then I find out that she shows this film to her house guests. There was this guy who came in from California who was staying with her and he looked at me and he goes — 'oh, I recognise you from her video' (laughs a lot).

From the outset, this fan is establishing herself in a position of close association with Anne. Later she says:

and now that I'm working where I am now, she's more part of my life, you know, 'cause I'm right here and we talk to them almost everyday (863).

The bookstore has given Diane the opportunity to strengthen her positions in the fandom. Her attitude towards her own position and other fans is very different to 'Dot' from Radway's study (Radway, 1984). Dot spent considerable time writing reviews for the other women readers and giving them advice about stories that would match their requirements. This official fan, on the other hand, sees her role as helping Anne, rather than the fans. The 'stories' that she tells draws a clear distinction between *her* position, which is that of a 'useful functionary' with an 'insider position' in the Rice dynasty and ordinary fans 'out there'. There is an emphasis on her usefulness to 'Anne' rather than as a source of irritation, unlike the ordinary fans who 'steal the dogs collars, you know and then she has to get new rabies numbers for them'.

On my second visit to the bookstore, there was an arrangement for me to meet the ARVLFC vice-president (now the president), who in the course of our conversation demonstrated similar attitudes. Without prompting, he told me about his relationship to 'Anne', 'I don't get in her face you know? When she needs me I'm there, but I don't *bother* her'. The implication is that these fans understand the rules of their fandom as quite different to the rules for 'ordinary' fans and these are expressed in positions. Here the rules are to be useful to 'Anne' and aloof from the 'other' fans who simply 'want a part of her'. The reward for adopting such positions is the achievement of 'insider status'. Both these fans are producing hierarchical distinctions between themselves and the ordinary fan. This distinction is an important aspect of position-taking, for it involves knowing how to behave appropriately in relation to the space of positions. As Bourdieu argues, the space of position-taking, 'i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field' is inseparable from the space of positions 'as defined by the possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital' and 'by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of distribution of this specific capital' (30). In dominant circles, that specific capital may be the appropriate knowledge of the sub-field and its history as well as the ability to designate the canon. In the sub-field of official vampire fandom, that capital is still defined as appropriate knowledge, in this case though, it is the ability to internalise the correct behaviour. That this 'capital' is

not evenly distributed was demonstrated to Susie and me on one of our visits to the bookstore. We witnessed the fan club vice-president teasing Max, one of the part-time bookstore employees (and fellow fan club member) in a cruel manner. The comments revolved around the way this fan too openly demonstrated his awe for Rice. He could always be seen 'hovering in the background' of photos of Rice. He spent too much time acting like a 'love sick puppy'. Max responded by going bright red in the face as the other fan club members present had a good laugh at his expense. When he discovered a few days later that Rice's personal assistant had offered Susie and me a tour of St Elizabeth's Orphanage he commented that 'some people would crawl butt-naked over broken glass' for such an opportunity. When Susie suggested (in earshot of the VP) that he come with us, he looked so eager that the VP relented and said 'okay, why not'. Later, as Susie and I were leaving the book store, Anne Rice and her entourage were spotted by Max walking up the steps of the small shopping mall which houses the bookstore. Like a shot, he ran to open the door for Rice and genuflected as she entered. This 'trainee' official fan had obviously not yet internalised the appropriate protocol of an 'insider' and 'functionary' and his apprenticeship seemed to chiefly involve being ridiculed when his behaviour was deemed inappropriate. He was still behaving too much like an ordinary fan and those who possessed greater 'capital' soon let him know his place.

Max eventually does seem to learn the rules of the position of 'official fan'. In the 1998 edition of the ARVLFC newsletter⁴⁵ he is introduced to us by the very fan club president (and newsletter editor) who had teased him so mercilessly the previous April, as a new regular columnist for the newsletter. This column consists of advice about collecting the valuable editions of Anne Rice and is entitled 'Interview With The Collector' (1998: 2). The column finishes with a section called 'What are they worth?', listing each of the values of Rice first editions and ends with the statement 'Information gathered from the Garden District Bookshop. Most first editions are in stock'. This is followed by the store's telephone number. This new column not only underlines once again the close links between the bookstore and the fan club, but also demonstrates that Max has adopted an appropriate (heteronomous) disposition and is on the road to achieving the desired 'insider status'.

These official fans conception of their practice as working *for* the object of their fandom in order to establish themselves as 'insiders' is significantly at odds with Jenkins' characterisation of fandom as a 'democratic' space for those who share a subordinate

position in the cultural hierarchy, nor does it fit with the notion that fans see themselves as part of a more expansive and inclusive cultural community. Indeed the map of vampire fandom in New Orleans is a hierarchical terrain in which official fans jockey for position within a hierarchy which they embrace rather than subvert. This poses serious questions about Jenkins' contention that '[f]andom's very existence represents a critique of conventional forms of consumer culture' (283). Rather than being at odds with a powerful producer, (as Jenkins suggests is often the case), in this case the 'powerful producer' is both object of fandom and source of income.

Jenkins claims that active media fandom has a tendency to have a 'distant relationship to textual producers'. He argues that this is due to the predominantly female nature of media fandom where women 'discovered that the close ties between male fans and male writers created a barrier to female fans' (48). Yet in the case of vampire fandom in New Orleans it is four female fans who establish a close relationship with Rice and set up the ARVLFC, thus establishing 'official' vampire fandom in New Orleans, and to an extent, the space of possible positions which subsequent fans must adapt themselves to.

Jenkins' argument that there is a regressive 'traditionally male-dominated literary fan' as opposed to a progressive 'fan culture more open to women' (48) does not fit the vampire fan culture in New Orleans. In this primarily female fandom, the split between fans here cannot be discovered along the lines of gender, but between official positions (occupied by men and women) which offer access to Rice and unofficial ones that do not. This is not to dispute the view that some fandoms are male dominated and that these fandoms can be exclusive of women. However, vampire fans in New Orleans (female or male) are not sharing common problems and common interests within vampire fandom, nor are they empowering themselves through the expression of a collective (if subordinate) identity with other fans in fan culture.

The fan club has a material interest in continuing its relations with Rice and thus finds it useful to police the boundaries of that fandom, both in terms of reiterations of Rice's intellectual property rights over her characters, and in terms of distinguishing between 'endorsed' activities and those that are not. This not only further demonstrates their usefulness to Rice, but also ensures the continued dominant position of the fan club. The newsletter of the fan club reminds fans in July 1996:

as stated many times before, there are no other official Anne Rice fan clubs, nor are there any official branches of the ARVLFC. Anyone claiming to be part of such an organisation other than this New Orleans based club is fully unauthorised and is not

recognized by Anne Rice, her publishers, or Anne Rice's Vampire Lestat Fan Club.

The implication of this 'warning' is that the ARVLFC is not only the only 'official' fan club, but also the only 'authentic' club because of its access to Rice and its recognition by her publishers. The fan club makes great use of their official links with Rice and her organization in terms of the prestige and 'authenticity' of the club's position in the field of vampire fandom. Earlier that year (March 1996), the newsletter carried the following warning in its pages:

Beware!

There are two organizations that are claiming to have endorsements or recommendations from the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club. They are Walking Tours here in New Orleans and Penny Lane Productions Inc.'s Darkside Weekends. We are not saying their product is bad. The point is we were never invited to participate in these events. We cannot recommend them to you if we haven't experienced them ourselves.

It is impossible to establish the 'truth' about these claims. What is of interest is that the fan club finds that it is able to make them and necessary to do so, in order to maintain its position and to keep poachers out of the grounds of Rice's fandom. The fan club newsletter claims the authority to 'recommend' or not on the basis of its insider status. On the same page of the newsletter was an advert for a video produced and sold by the vice-president:

The Memnoch Ball ON VIDEO!

The official video of The Memnoch Ball has arrived. Do not be fooled by imitations...

Below this advert, the vice-president endorses a new book *Haunted City: an unauthorized guide to the Magical, Magnificent New Orleans of Anne Rice*. These are symptomatic of the fan club's attempt to patrol the (commercial) borders of vampire fandom in New Orleans in relation to Rice and to promote and protect their own merchandise and position by way of official association with Rice. This kind of 'gate keeping' is combined with vocally reproducing certain attitudes held by Rice herself regarding the activities of fans. At the time, Warner Brothers owned the movie rights to many of Rice's vampire characters and she was by her own admission (and still is) protective about her intellectual property rights. On her own home page in 1996 Rice comments:

remember guys, I love your feedback on everybody from Azriel to Louis and Armand, but when it comes to ideas about plots and things of that nature, those are things you should really use to create your own wonderful literary world.

These sentiments are defended by the official fans in New Orleans who disparage the fan fiction of other fans with comments that the characters are 'Anne's creations' and should remain so. One can only assume that the fan club is unaware of how central fan fiction is to fandom in the US (cf. Jenkins: 1992) or that they are unprepared to assimilate it into the fandom of Rice, due to the conflicting interests of Rice and their connection to her. It is the proximity of Rice to this fandom that delimits the space of possible positions in the fan club to those in line with her interests. The following section will discuss Rice's own position-taking in this sub-field of fandom.

Anne Rice in the sub-field of vampire fandom

Ken Gelder draws on Bourdieu's concept of 'positions' and 'position-takings' to argue that Rice herself adopts more than one position in the cultural field. In particular he suggests that Anne Rice attempted to occupy more than one position in the field of cultural production during the making of *Interview With The Vampire* (Geffen Pictures/Warner Brothers 1994). He suggests that she refused her place in the relatively 'restricted' field of the 'author' by making public statements about the casting of the film. For example, in an interview in the *Los Angeles Times* she voices her disapproval of Tom Cruise in the role of the Vampire Lestat, 'Cruise is no more my vampire Lestat than Edward G. Robinson is Rhett Butler' (quoted in Gelder, 1996: 30). Later, she also takes out a full page advert in *Vanity Fair* to repeat these claims. Rice refuses to be simply the 'author' of the book which is to become a film. She attempts to place herself in the field of large-scale movie production by these public pronouncements. She also insists that the screen play is attributed to her even though it was written by Neil Jordan. Thus Rice is attempting to occupy more than one 'available position' in relation to the making of the film.

However, it was not only during the making of *Interview With The Vampire* that Rice attempted to occupy more than one available position. Rice occupies the position of writer; cultural critic; star personality; 'accessible' object of fandom; property developer; famous recluse; and head of a dynasty. But crucial in terms of the fans' confusion about their 'included' status as fans, is Rice's simultaneous self positioning as 'top ranking fan'

and ‘object’ of fandom. There is a strict hierarchy in the official vampire fan culture in New Orleans and Rice is at the apex of it both in terms of being the object of fandom and the ‘top fan’.

Rice positions herself as *object* of fandom in a number of ways; she has a fan hotline with a personal message from her to the fans which changes every few days and fans can leave messages for her on this number; she attends book signings at various locations; the publication of *Commotion Strange* which is a newsletter and a web site where she writes directly to her fans which has an intimate and accessible tone. These are conventional avenues by which fans may gain access to the object of their fandom. However, Rice also positions herself as a fan. Most strikingly she adopts the position as the vampire Lestat’s best and most devoted fan. She refers to him in *Commotion Strange* as him ‘my demon lover’, and at the 1995 book signing she dressed in gothic wedding gear as Lestat’s bride. Furthermore, in *Commotion Strange* she also adopts the tone of a ‘fan’. In the edition after the film was released in the US in 1994, she discusses the film *Interview With The Vampire* as a fan would (preserving her status as top of the fan hierarchy by her insider knowledge of Lestat). She starts, ‘So here goes, point by point’. This is followed by discussion of the ‘sets’ and ‘atmosphere’. She then goes on to discuss the actors with statements like:

Favorite Brad Pitt moments for me:

- * Brad's soft voice saying the single syllable "No" when Lestat prepares to give the Dark Gift to Claudia.

- * Brad's last real scene with Claudia, their discussion on the balcony outside the hotel room — another contribution from Jordan which was never in my original script.

The informality of tone and address suggests that Rice is a fan like any one else. But Rice is both fan and author in this traversing of two positions within the field, and she reminds us of her authorship. This movement is continuous in *Commotion Strange*; Rice clearly won’t ‘play the game’ of ‘position taking’, and while at one level she is thumbing her nose at the media establishment, which is quite good fun, at another level she is making it impossible for the fans to find an ‘available position’ for themselves without playing her own game of hierarchies.

Rice is also a millionaire business woman with her own company Kith and Kin whose personnel is literally populated by ‘kith’ and ‘kin’. Rice seems to have established a kind of kingdom-cum-theme-park in New Orleans by buying up a variety of properties in the Garden District⁴⁶ which are all settings for her novels. The only people who are

allowed access to these properties are people who hold official positions in the Rice Kingdom, whether they be family, employees, fan club personnel or friends.

Rice has also taken up an (unofficial) position in the political domain, taking out ads encouraging a vote for the Democratic Party and an 'open' letter to the Clintons. She has taken an (unofficial) position in the city's cultural politics again by taking out adverts in the *Times Picayune* condemning the architectural design of a new restaurant in the Garden District⁴⁷, taking up a position within the field of culture, this time as critic. While Rice is very vocal in the public domain, she also positions herself contradictorily as a 'recluse', by making it known through her newsletter and the ARVLFC fanzine that she refuses to 'do' interviews for fear of misquotation.

Rice's simultaneous adoption of a variety of 'available positions' has an important impact on vampire fandom in New Orleans. It has produced a distinction between 'official' fandom which is intimately associated with Anne Rice and unofficial fandom, which is not. The official fans have adopted 'available positions' as functionaries and ground keepers within the Kith and Kin hierarchy, and the rules which govern this position in the hierarchy are 'usefulness' to Rice in 'official' fan capacities. Unlike the 'inclusive' fan culture described by Jenkins, the unofficial fans I talked to found the culture exclusive, in other words, there was no available position for them to occupy as fan in terms of fandom as they understood it through their own more autonomous dispositions. In a review of Jenkins' study, Barker comments that Jenkins' approach gives a sense of 'a world of democratic collectivism, busily creating cultures, freely and against the grain of oppressive cultures' and he asks, '[y]et how does fan culture police its own boundaries and ?' (1993: 673). I would like to suggest that the border controls operating in this fandom are not the exception that proves the rule⁴⁸, but is part of a wider struggle in fan culture to establish, through the taking of positions, the legitimate interests and concerns of the fan. Bourdieu argues that the 'opposition between the "commercial" and the "non-commercial" reappears everywhere' (1993: 82), and I have argued that it takes place in fan culture in the US as seen in the antagonisms between official fans and unofficial fans in vampire fan culture in New Orleans. However, there are also fandoms which eschew the commercialism that so marks the ARVLFC and it is to one such fan club that I now turn, the London Vampire Group. The different national locations of each fandom is significant for, as Bourdieu argues, the degree to which one set of values or the other can impose its 'norms' 'varies considerably from one period to another and one national tradition to another, and affects the whole structure of the field'

(40). However, I will not be arguing that the American fandom is more commercial because of the structure of the cultural field in the US. I have already demonstrated the anti-commercial positions of many of the unofficial vampire fans. Furthermore, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to embark on a discussion about the relative commercialisation of either national cultural field, particularly in the current fluid context where ‘commercial imperatives’ are encroaching on every aspect of life in Britain. Instead, I will concentrate on the ‘micro’ differences that pertain directly to the fandom. I have already suggested that it is the force of Anne Rice herself which structures the positions available to ‘official’ fandom in New Orleans. Similarly, I will suggest that it is key position-takers who affect the space of possible positions in the LVG.

Part Two: Vampire Fandom in Britain

Fandom-for-fandom’s-sake: autonomy and conflict

The fans and fan clubs that I became involved with in Britain for this research shared an autonomous ‘fandom-for-fandom’s-sake’ disposition. This is not to say that there are no commercial imperatives at work in vampire fandom in Britain however. When I first wrote to fan clubs asking for interviews with members I received replies from organisations selling merchandise and paid activities such as role playing games and weekends away. Yet the individuals who contacted me for interviews did not engage in this form of fandom; instead there was a shared sense that an interest in the figure of the vampire was for its own sake. The discussion of the ARVLFC above has concentrated on the antagonisms between the heteronomous (commercial) values and autonomous (‘purist’) values of vampire fandom in New Orleans. This part of the chapter will demonstrate that the antagonisms within this fandom are not restricted to heteronomous versus autonomous values (although it is on this terrain that they seem most pronounced), but that those who share the autonomous disposition can also be embroiled in conflict. It will be argued, borrowing Bourdieu’s analysis of the artistic field, that the hostility between different fan groups at the autonomous pole stems from the tendency towards hierarchization which structures the cultural field, in this case the ‘*autonomous principle of hierarchization*’ (38).

Many of the fans I spoke to in Britain spoke to me of the ‘trouble’ between the British Vampyre Society (BVS) and the London Vampire Group (LVG). Initially, I did not

understand the significance of these comments. It was only after returning from my visit to New Orleans (where the hostility between the different fan positions was so conspicuous) that I followed up this line of investigation with British fans. I interviewed one of the founding members of the LVG and asked him specifically about these troubles as well as holding a number of conversations with fans at one of the LVG's regular meetings. I was unable to interview the president of the BVS and therefore accounts I have of this 'trouble' come primarily from those who associate themselves with the LVG. One exception is Dee whose accounts will be quoted at length in order to balance the LVG accounts. Before this I want to lay out the key elements that different versions of the event share.

The four original members of the LVG had all been members of the BVS. There was a disagreement between some of the members and the president of the BVS regarding membership lists and activities. As a result a number of members either left of their own accord or were thrown out and went on to set up the LVG. The president of the BVS then had her home burgled and motorcycle stolen and accuses key members of the LVG. There are also many rumours that the LVG stole membership lists from the BVS and deliberately sabotaged events organized by the president of the BVS, both of which the accused adamantly deny. Dee was the first to tell me about this conflict, and it arose as a topic of conversation about which fanzines she writes for. When I asked her if she writes for the BVS journal. Dee explains:

they've been having a lot of trouble, I'm not sure what's happening there...there was a big do and a big fall-out, she'd⁴⁹ been burgled and she thought it was something to do with this group that was in her group and had broken away from her. It's all gotten a bit bitchy. Now I do think the Vampyre Society were a bit...a bit of an elitist clique. I never ever sent them anything, anyway. I think (my friend)'s stuff is brilliant and they rejected all of her stuff (38).

With little prompting Dee elaborates:

she made a comment in a magazine which, she wrote it herself so it was her own fault but, I mean when you write something and somebody else reads it you don't always read it the way they've written it do you? ... and she upset a lot of people, she had a lot of people ringing her up and hassling her at gigs and stuff like that. And a lot of people who — there's been no magazine for ages, and a lot of people who subscribe resolved to not re-subscribe, a lot of people got their subscriptions sent back [...] and I thought I might be guilty by association, I don't know what's happening because I thought it was supposed to be a society for people who liked

vampires. [...] So I'd been waiting for my subscription to be returned because I'd not had a magazine or had a letter, and then earlier this week they sent me a new membership card, I thought, well I'm in, but they've not said anything about it. [...] She seems to think that a lot of people have got it in for her. Now why, I don't know. Maybe a lot of people have, because I say, I don't know her at all. And then she wrote everybody a really nice letter to tell everybody what was going on *without* telling us what was going on. So I think she's feeling persecuted and there's been...some people broke off from her group and tried to form their own group, the London Vampire Group, and I think she thinks it's these people. I don't know who they are anyway, I'm not able to go to meetings [...] She sends out lists of things that are going on, then supposedly they've taken computer files or an address book or something and they've been sending out these things, copies of them, but not exact, they've got all the wrong dates on and stuff like that and people weren't turning up for her meetings, you know. Things like that [...] I mean, this is (the BVs president)'s side. And then she's never accused them right out, she insinuated that it may possibly have been them who burgled her house one night when they all knew she was out. And somebody else stole her motorbike, and maybe they could have put somebody up to it. But she keeps saying 'it's not fair, I live on my own, why are people doing this to me', oh you know (40 - 52).

It is interesting that Dee feels sympathy with the president of the club at the same time as considering the club that she runs to be elitist⁵⁰. Dee tells me that a pen pal wrote in a newsletter 'due to the recent troubles in the Vampire Society, I'm not sure how many people still consider themselves associated with it' and she comments;

I did think 'pff' when I read it, even me, so...and I thought it's not (the BVS president) that's causing the trouble, she's on the receiving end, and the way she wrote it, it sounded more like it was her who was causing the trouble, you know (58).

Dee also clearly considers all of the splits and in-fighting to be irritating (which rather pale into insignificance compared to her son's very serious illness). When I ask her which groups associate with each other she responds with the remark 'I think we're all supposed to, you know...most people are in all the groups. I don't think anybody's just in one, so you'd think they'd all pull together, yeah' (60)?

Karen shares Dee's frustration regarding the in-fighting among the different clubs (despite the fact that she tells quite a different version of the episode). Karen tells me:

the Vampyre Society and the London Vampire Group are originated from the Vampyre Society and then they segregated it you see, so they are now like two separate groups. But I am friends with both groups so I will not be dictated to [about] who I can be friends with

or who I will go and see or where I will go. So I will not stop being friends with one group of people just because another group of people may not feel that I should (188).

Both Dee and Karen's accounts of the splits between the groups and their expression of annoyance once again undermine the celebratory accounts of fan culture. Vampire fan culture is not simply a space where common cultural interests are shared, but it is also a space where struggles ensue over who can legitimately have memberships lists, organize activities, run newsletters and so on. In other words, it is a contest over who has the right to designate what is legitimate in terms of participation in fandom, and just as the fans who are not engaged in the club personnel in New Orleans are put off by this jockeying for position, so too are similarly disengaged fans in Britain, despite the 'side' taken in the quarrel. Karen tells a significantly different version of the events to Dee for instance, but what is clear from both version of the event is that a power struggle was taking place. What follows is Karen's version of the 'trouble':

Milly: So the two groups do they not get on then (189)?

Karen: No! There was a big court case and everything. Apparently ... oh yes, one of the founder members of the Vampire Society writes slanderous information and sent it out to all members without forewarning the people she was talking about, which would have led to a civil court case which I think has now been dropped. Everything got totally out of hand. All she had to do was write an apology to each of the persons involved and a written retraction in the magazine and that would have got her out of the wrong which, she was totally in the wrong because you don't slander someone. That's defamation of character (190)

Milly: What was she saying (191)?

Karen: Oh, that they had used funds for their own personal purposes and stuff like that which is totally inaccurate. It is basically that she founded the group and it was her baby. She was in total control and she snapped her fingers and they did as she wanted them to do. But they organized all the events, they collected all the money, they got all the air tickets and the boarding passes and everything sorted out and then she turned on them and you know you don't do that to people you're working with (192).

Whether one is inclined to accept Dee's account or Karen's, the crux of the matter is: who occupies dominant positions in this dominated strata of the field of culture; who organizes events, decides what kinds of events and activities run; who is legitimate or not. Bourdieu suggests that the autonomous end of the field is where confrontations are 'more continuous' because the terrain is more uncertain. He writes, '[o]ffering positions that are relatively uninstitutionalized, never legally guaranteed, therefore open to

symbolic challenge, and non-hereditary [...], it is the arena *par excellence* of struggles over job definition' (62). The section of vampire fandom that is influenced by the values of autonomy shares these characteristics, including the often tumultuous relations between different fractions, split-offs and groups. However, unlike the heteronomous pole of vampire fandom, where the stakes are always about control of potential sites of profitability, the struggles in the autonomous sub-field can sometimes be stultifying but can also be vibrant - shaking up the space of positions for agents and creating new ones, giving rise to a lively vampire fan culture. One might say that the LVG, despite the unsavoury events that lead to its creation, is such a case. But perhaps it is more accurate to say that it is because of the unpleasant event that led to its founding that the group is strikingly democratic in structure. The following section will examine the LVG based on my own observations when attending group meetings and interview material with one of the founding members, George.

The 'London Vampire Group'

The London Vampire Group (LVG) was set up in 1995 by four ex-members of the British Vampyre Society. It is a non-profit fan club that holds monthly gatherings; publishes a newsletter and a journal, *The Chronicles* which it sells at a loss; charges minimal annual membership fees (£10 waged) and organizes activities (including trips abroad) at cost. The bulletin announces 'activities for the vampyre enthusiast' (Bulletin VIII, Summer, 1997) and lists visits to the British Museum and the South Bank, gigs, parties, quiz nights, conventions and pub meetings. The club can be said to be influenced by the ideas of the autonomous pole of the field of cultural production, 'fandom-for-fandom's-sake' as it translates in this sub-field of culture. Many informal discussions with fans at their gatherings make it clear that the rationale for the club is 'pure' interest in the vampire figure. I was told that the club does not court publicity, although individual members may do so, and is not interested in making money. The club is seen as a place to meet like-minded people and to explore the history of the vampire myth. For instance, issue six of *The Chronicles* (Autumn 1998) carries letters on what it means to be 'Gothic'. There is an article on Bram Stoker's Dublin and another on corsets. There are poems and a short history of Countess Bathory, as well as reviews, recipes and competitions. George, a founding member, told me that the intention is to make the club a welcoming place to anyone interested in vampires and to collaborate

with other clubs for big events. Bulletin VIII (written by George) reiterates this approach; ‘we have had enquiries from various vampire groups notably “the Children of Darkness”, “the Spirit Undead” and “the Midland Vampire Group” and their efforts should be supported. If any of them is local to you then please get in touch using the addresses on the information page’ (The LGV Bulletin VIII, Summer 1997)

George’s version of the ‘troubles’ are pertinent to understanding the club’s structure, because despite my inability to verify this version of events, it is through this discussion that George explains the reasons for the structure of the club which can be confirmed as democratic. During a conversation at one of the pub meets, George told me that the president of the British Vampyre Society ‘booted out’ him and three other members for organizing activities without her prior consent. He suggests that she made the accusation of theft in order to hide the real issues. George claims that the foursome were expelled some time before any accusations were made and argues that the real motive for ‘kicking them out’ can be found in the popularity of the events they were organizing. According to George, the president felt as though she were losing sole control over the club she had established. He claims that ‘there was no need for her paranoia’, they were being enthusiastic members with no plans for a take-over bid. A number of fan club members made comments about The BVS president’s ‘paranoia’, including Karen who was at the time still a member of the BVS. Fan club members suggested that the president was overly selective in the material she published (and this accusation is repeated by Dee who sided with the BVS) and overly controlling about sanctioning activities. Once again, and in a different national context, we find that fan culture is rife with divisions, rather than an inclusive, harmonious space.

This incident (whichever version of events, if any, is most accurate) had a huge impact on the structure of the LVG. George, who said repeatedly how ‘horrible’ the whole episode was explains, ‘that’s why we had to be democratic [...] we don’t want a big leader here’ (6). Actually, George is seen as a leading figure in the fan club and it was certainly his influence that set up the club’s constitution. George was for many years the ‘health and safety’ representative for the local National Association of Teachers in Further and Higher Education union branch in the south London college where he taught engineering, and he told me ‘we just took that structure over to ours. We have an AGM, we elect officers, we have a constitution, you know and everyone can attend and we all have a vote and that’s how things get done’(9).⁵¹ Later in the interview he said:

we don't want a situation where - you see everyone has to feel included and encouraged and that is something that we are really good at [...] and we help out other clubs whenever we can, you know we have got a lot of skills now in producing the newsletter and we've helped the () and () set up theirs (87).

The LVG then claims for itself a space of possible positions which attempts to avoid the tendency towards hierarchization though democratic elections and so on. The following section will consider these claims in relation to my own observations of the monthly gatherings of the club.

The LVG gatherings

The LVG meets once a month in the evening in a basement of a Victorian London pub. The gatherings tend to have an attendance of between 30 and 50 and seemed to be very busy and lively with fans chatting informally or making plans for future events. Members tended to sit in groups with a certain amount of to-ing and fro-ing between different groups. I was struck at the first meeting I attended by the elaborate nature of the vampire attire worn by the vast majority of the members in attendance. A number of members were very friendly and welcoming towards me (these were mainly the officers who knew I was coming and a bit about the research) and I was introduced to a number of people. The majority of people were female although there were a good number of men and the majority of faces were white apart from three black men of Afro-Caribbean descent.

The gathering seemed to bear out the inclusive claims made by the club officers in some ways and in others did not. For instance at one table sat a number of gay men (including the three black men) who were clear that a newcomer such as myself should be made aware of and accepting of their sexual identity. These men obviously felt at ease and 'included' in the club, contributing to (and protecting) that atmosphere of inclusion in their friendly but forthright dealings with newcomers. Another group dominating the centre of the room consisted of a group of women with working class accents and quick-fire banter. I noticed that their uproarious laughter was drawing a few looks and murmured comments and one of the club officers looked in their direction and said to me, 'you will find that some of our members are more erudite than others'. This comment reveals differences in dispositions as well as positions when occupying the 'post' of fan. Bourdieu proposes that dispositions in the artistic field 'help to shape

positions' and that part of holding the 'post' of artist is having the appropriate disposition in relation to the laws of the field (such as the qualities of 'disinterestedness and daring' (62) as well as a knowledge of artistic form). This both stems from and contributes to the existing cultural hierarchy. Similarly part of holding the 'post' of fan in the sphere of fandom-for-fandom's-sake is the possession of certain (class biased) qualities such as erudition and genre knowledge. Karen, who was one of the group of loud women told me in our interview later that quite a number of the members were 'posers' and 'snobs' (122). This stems from her own differing working-class disposition where she values 'having a laugh'. This does not mean that there is no serious side to Karen's fandom (her comments about her own writing and sartorial practices discussed in the previous two chapters demonstrate this), rather that the middle-class etiquette displayed by some members at gatherings was at odds with her own values. She says of the LVG:

there is a lot of good points in them and there is a lot of bad points in them as well [...] but, you know they either have to accept me as I am or they can stay away you know, it is their hang-ups they have got to get over (120).

For Karen, just as for the unofficial fans in New Orleans, vampire fandom is marked by 'cliquishness'. Karen tells me;

I joined the old Vampyre Society but in both times they can be very cliquey, you know? You got your own little group that sit with people and you know (194)

Milly: Is that the same in the London Vampire Group (195)?

Karen: Oh yeah, they have got a lot of new members from the Vampyre Society anyway and it can be just the same at times, but as I say when we move to Devon we will be leaving that behind (196).

Vampire fandom in Britain, then, is wracked with conflict even among those who share the autonomous disposition. There is a struggle amongst 'official fans' (club personnel) over the legitimacy of positions and position-holders as well as between official fans and unofficial fans who are less interested in the game of position-taking.

Conclusion

The accounts of vampire fandom offered from vampire fans themselves seems to suggest that the existing theoretical accounts of fan culture are inadequate. To suggest that fan are, in a homogenous manner, cultural resisters or subversives or that fan culture unanimously opposes mainstream culture is to ignore the many conflicts and struggles

that characterize vampire fandom and thus avoids having to accommodate this prevalent aspect of fandom in the now standard model of fandom-as-resistance. This chapter has attempted to make sense of strife on the terrain of fandom by turning to Bourdieu's model of the cultural field in which the conflict between the opposing principles of cultural worth that dominate the field are understood as the dynamic of the field. I have suggested that the values of the dominant principles of heteronomy (bourgeois commercialism) and less influential but still dominant autonomous values ('pure taste') influence the sub-field of fandom and those take positions there. I would like to suggest that although vampire fandom has its own specificities, the conflicts and position-takings are not unique to this fandom but are a feature of media fandom. Indeed Chapter Two of this thesis has highlighted the existence of conflict in other studies of fandom despite the general tendency to skirt over or explain away such phenomenon. Applying Bourdieu's analysis of the field of cultural production to fandom seems to offer a way of accounting for the conflicts in fandom without reasserting the pathological motivations which are often ascribed to fans.

However, although this chapter has argued that fandom as a cultural formation is not automatically subverting dominant cultural values of legitimacy, this thesis does not intend to suggest that fandom is empty of rebellion. As Chapter Seven has argued, the sartorial practices of vampire fans are understood by the fans as rebellion and this cannot simply be put down to subcultural rhetoric or elitist practices of distinction (Thornton). However, offering a theory of the potential for resistance in fandom is fraught with problems, particularly if one adopts an entirely uncritical stance in relation to Bourdieu's analysis of the cultural field. For example, it seems that Bourdieu focuses on the elitist aspects of avant garde movements at the expense of underplaying the significant disruption that some movements have posed to conventional ways of seeing (and thus undermining bourgeois domination).

Furthermore, in a dominated and subordinate cultural formation such as fandom, one might suggest that to break with the idea that cultural production should primarily be for profit, is to break with the increasingly influential dominant set of principles about cultural worth⁵² and to challenge the idea that one is primarily a 'consumer'. That fans who are influenced by the autonomous pole have rejected such values seems to suggest that they are (at least partly) rejecting the dominant principles of the dominant end of the field. But the fact that rejecting one set of dominant values happens through taking on a

less dominant (but still dominated) set of values, poses problems for a simple notion of resistance. This seems to revolve around two issues. It is because of the specific history of the development of art-for-art's-sake that artists had to distinguish themselves from the bourgeoisie (and the associated principles) and develop a 'pure gaze' (199) which judged artistic worth on the basis of aesthetics, disconnected, from the 'vulgarity' of the economic, political and social. This led to an elitist position because they distinguished themselves not only from the bourgeoisie, but also from the 'uninitiated' (Bourdieu, 1993: 118), that is the ordinary public, through knowledge of the history of artistic form and the means by which to judge artistic worth. The mass of the population is excluded from such knowledge as those who designate value also designate who can designate value. A version of this hierarchization can be seen to be operating in fan culture, just as middle-brow art must 'borrow from high art' (129). As has been argued, the fan must develop competence in her or his fandom which involves a knowledge of the history of the genre, its transformations, high moments. It also involves designating legitimacy so that distinctions and exclusions must be made.

Furthermore, I would like to suggest that those fans who adopt an autonomous position are more likely to see their fandom as disconnected from other fields and that this further undermines the extent to which their activity can be characterized as resistance. This is because the very idea of autonomy leads away from the fields of power and politics; the fields in which social change must be effected, for, as Bourdieu argues, those who want to clash with the prevailing norms of the cultural field 'cannot succeed with the help of external changes' (58). Barker makes a similar point about fandom when he comments, 'my own research into comic fans has taught me [that] fandom operates by rules and limits that frequently debar any attempt to weaken the boundaries between fandom and other cultural, or social and political worlds' (1993: 673). Therefore, the part of fandom that has broken with commercialism as a *raison-d'être* for cultural production can still produce a space of possible positions where one must conform to the pre-established competences in the sub-field of the fandom including a disposition of detachment.

However, external changes in the sphere of politics and power can promote change in the space of possible positions, where the values of non-commercialism continue to be asserted, but which have shaken loose the adherence to notions of autonomy from the world of politics. Bourdieu identifies this trend in art when he suggests that the 1848 French revolutions led the autonomous pole to shift away from abstract art and towards

‘social art’ (58). In a contemporary subcultural formation, (which is comparable to vampire fandom), Osgerby (1998) identifies in the rave scene, a split between commercial event promoters, who set up legal establishments, and ravers who became politicised as a result of the Criminal Justice Bill.⁵³

What is being proposed, then, is that breaking with commercial cultural values in fandom is a prerequisite (but not a guarantee) for cultural resistance. Those fandoms which accept the bourgeois, heteronomous principles of cultural legitimacy are too wedded to dominant cultural values to be seen as subversive. Furthermore, it is being proposed that fandom can contain some practices that are rebellious and others are not, and that this contradiction characterises not just the wider fandom but also the differing practices of individual fans themselves. A fan does not have to read the *Vampire Chronicles* ‘against the grain’ to find the imaginative resources to engage in sartorial revolt, for instance. Yet this same fan might reject the writings of other fans that are not deemed up to scratch, thus acting as an arbiter of taste and engaging in the elitist principles of hierarchization that Bourdieu explains characterize the autonomous approach to culture.

Individuals and groups can engage in activities as part of their fandom that constitute rebellion to some aspects of wider culture and this offers valuable evidence against the contention that audiences are passified by mass culture, but it falls short of a total opposition to dominant culture and its overthrow. Fandom is not a cultural formation outside of the field of culture, but (from a dominated position), participates in and is a part of the wider struggle to define legitimate cultural value, (partly evidenced by its recent entry into the academy), forcing into the cultural sphere a debate about objects and practices previously deemed unworthy. Thus, despite its subordinate nature, fandom affects the entire space of possible positions in the field of cultural production.

CONCLUSION

This thesis has examined vampire fandom in Britain and New Orleans through the ideas and practices of some of the women who inhabit this fan culture and has analysed a range of topics that, unlike many studies of fandom does not end with fannish interpretations and the practices that surround them. This thesis also considers the *texts* which motivate the fandom, taking into account what the texts may have to offer and why the women who participated in this study engage with them, rather than the fan theory approach which tends to view texts as irrelevant to fannish interpretation. There has also been an analysis of the clubs (and the people who run them) that help to organize the fan culture, which is a central aspect of fandom missing from most studies. Furthermore, as a case study, this analysis of fandom has offered a critique of existing theories of meaning and of practice. I have criticised the male-centred Freudian interpretations of the vampire and have suggested alternative theories of meaning which are more in tune both with the women fans' interpretations as well as the genre transformation of the past 30 years, with the renewed emphasis on the gothic. I have also challenged the theories of identification which spring from psychoanalytic textual analysis and have turned to more sociological accounts of engagements with texts to discuss the women's fandom.

In addition, I have challenged the validity of the prevailing theorization of fandom as a mode of resistance to, or subversion of, dominant culture. I have provided an alternative theoretical model for fandom, based on Bourdieu's analysis of the field of cultural production, to suggest that fandom is situated within existing cultural relations and is influenced by the opposing sets of principles at the dominant end of the field and also by the struggles that arise as a result of these antagonistic ideas of cultural worth. However, I have not adopted Bourdieu's model uncritically. Instead, I have questioned particular elements, which, while not invalidating his model, require that the analyst combine Bourdieu's general perspective with other approaches that can focus on the different *specific* practices that are involved in vampire fandom. For instance, I have suggested that Bourdieu's analysis of popular taste deals with only one facet of the taste of those who do not occupy the dominant pole of the cultural field and that he leaves aside the issue of the influence that dominant cultural principles may have beyond the dominant pole. Furthermore, despite pointing out that popular taste is oriented towards

textual content (rather than form), his model of the space of possible positions offers no way of thinking about content other than as effects of the positions that agents take in the field. Therefore I have drawn upon feminist cultural theory which offers both analyses of fictional content and ways of understanding the relationship between content and women's reading practices, including the complex blend of emotional proximity (which Bourdieu describes as popular taste) and critical distance (which he does not).

Furthermore, while it has been suggested that fan culture is not automatically oppositional, I have examined those aspects of the women's activities that they define in the language of rebellion and this has also involved drawing on theorists other than Bourdieu. For while Bourdieu recognises the influence that social upheavals outside of the field of culture can have in the cultural field, his representation of the field does not include a discussion the momentous struggles this century which have influenced the space of possible positions that agents can occupy, by offering alternatives to the principals that dominate the field of culture. This thesis has demonstrated how, in particular, the women's movement provided new discourses through which women in fan culture can make sense of their cultural choices and experiences in the context of continuing discrimination. Also, because Bourdieu's target is the powerful end of the field of culture, his emphasis is on the elitist distinctions that (dominant) agents make between themselves and others when they take up positions in the field and theorists who follow this emphasis when analysing subordinate cultural formations tend to dismiss expressions of anti-commercialism as elitist distinctions and also miss moments when rebellion does take place. Thus, instead of seeing women who dress as vampires as making elitist distinctions, I have drawn on theories of dress to demonstrate that this sartorial practice does have genuine rebellious intent in a long tradition of anti-fashion, with these fans drawing on the historical connotations of dressing in black in order to reject certain aspects of femininity associated with dress. However, I have argued that this is a rebellion of the self rather than of society, a reaffirmation of identity rather than a challenge to dominant culture.

This thesis, then, has been interdisciplinary, drawing on scholarship from relevant disciplines and bringing them together in order to analyse the many features of women in vampire fandom. The qualitative method employed necessitated such an approach, because the intention was for this research to be led by the accounts offered by the fans, drawing on theories appropriate to those accounts. It is also apposite to cross

disciplinary boundaries when examining cultural practices, because in their complexity they cannot be contained in a single idea.

Notes and References

¹ Feminists support these readings of the vampire as misogynistic by pointing to the scene in *Dracula*, reproduced in countless films, where the Crew of Light trap the now vampiric Lucy in her crypt and Holmswood (her fiancée) drives a stake into her body. For Cranny-Francis this scene is 'one of the most brutal and repulsive in the book' (Cranny-Francis, 1988: 68) while Showalter (1990) and Senf (1988) both read the scene as a gang rape.

² The Vampire Chronicles keep growing, the latest being *Merrick* (Chatto and Windus, 2000)

³ Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us, 'unspeakable' 'is a favourite Gothic word' (1980: 4)

⁴ Indeed some fans seem to enjoy such descriptions.

⁵ The only fans that Jenkins' criticises are male *Twin Peaks* fans, on the basis of their masculine approach to culture. All female fans however, are resisting patriarchy in his scheme. This is a kind of reverse tokenism – all are good except (token) male fans.

⁶ While identifying an important component in subordinate taste however, Bourdieu oversimplifies the aesthetic dispositions of ordinary people. I will argue in Chapter Five that the women vampire fans can combine the deliberate suspension of disbelief – that is, 'playing the game' – by suggesting that the *Vampires Chronicles* are 'real', with critical distance which displays a knowledge of the conventions in operation in the fiction.

⁷ It must also be stated that Bourdieu also does not discuss the content of cultural objects because of his critique of those positions which want to attribute intrinsic value to things.

⁸ I doubt anyone has ever suggested that those with money are oppressed economically.

⁹ There are ways of valuing the reading practices of subordinate social formations without slipping into over celebrations; some feminist cultural theory has provided detailed analyses of women's reading pleasures which demonstrate both the value of those practices (Brunsdon, 1997; Byars, 1991; D'acci, 1987; Geraghty, 1991; Modleski, 1982; Radway, 1984) and offer a detailed historical account of how feminine genres and pleasures have come to be devalued (Gledhill, 1987b; Huyssen, 1986)

¹⁰ It is evident that Bacon-Smith is delighted at being accepted as a fan in the inner circle when she writes, '[a]s fans accepted that I had become knowledgeable in the circuit [...] [they] began to reveal their hidden identities' (1992: 215). As will be discussed in the next chapter, from a methodological point of view, Bacon-Smith may be considered to be 'going native'.

¹¹ The Birmingham School approach to subcultures-as-resistance provides the tradition which much fan theory draws on. This chapter will not discuss this work at length however because of the need to discuss the growing body of fan literature and also because it has been thoroughly critiqued by Thornton.

¹² Although it can be argued that Bourdieu also lifts concepts from their context. See John Frow (1995) *Cultural Studies and Cultural Value*, Oxford: Oxford University Press for an extension discussion of this issue.

¹³ This is the translators insert.

¹⁴ Bourdieu exemplifies this in his analysis of 'Flaubert's Point of View' in *The Field of Cultural Production*, Ed. Randal Johnson, Polity Press: Cambridge, 1993. He demonstrates that in writing *Madame Bovary*, Flaubert situated himself actively within the space of possibilities and possible choices. Flaubert chose to write a novel and thus risk association with what was considered to be an inferior form as well as a form in which a variety of different writers and sub-genres were lumped together - where no 'great' author stood out. But Flaubert positioned himself against genre writing on the one hand and the (successful) sentimental writing of Feuillet on the other. However, he also positioned himself against the 'realist' school. Thus, Flaubert was putting himself in an impossible position in relation to the positions available in the field at the time. He manages, according to Bourdieu, to create a new range of possible positions. Bourdieu states, 'taking the point of view of a Flaubert who had not become Flaubert, we try to discover what he had to do and wanted to do in a world that was not yet transformed by what he in fact did, which is to say, the world to which we refer him by treating him as a "precursor"' (205).

¹⁵ Bourdieu argues that the autonomization of the cultural sphere began in Quattro Centro Florence, but accelerated in the Industrial Revolution and the Romantic reaction. This was a period of growth in the culture industry which coincides with the growth of the reading public, 'which turned new classes (including women) into consumers of culture' (1993: 113). These conditions began the process of differentiation between the various fields of production and created conditions that were favourable to the construction of 'pure theories'. (113) Art for art's sake was born in this period of differentiation because of the combined impact of the artists liberation from the 'patron' and the simultaneous submission to the laws

of the impersonal market. The ideologies of disinterestedness and the insistence of the separation of art from the commodity 'appear to be just so many reactions to the pressures of an anonymous market' (114). These conditions extended into the logic of cultural distinction and the development of taste, which excludes the taste of others. In particular was the development of the 'pure gaze', or the 'aesthetic gaze'. 'It did so by dissociating art-as-commodity from art-as-pure signification, produced according to a purely symbolic intent for purely symbolic appropriation, that is, for disinterested delectation, irreducible to simple material possession' (114).

¹⁶ This stems from his notion that the art-for-art's sake specific capital is really just misrecognised economic capital. But Bourdieu then qualifies this with the notion of 'sincerity' in such a position taking in which agents really believe in these values as they must, because of the system of the production of belief and also, that the accumulation of economic capital is always long term and only available to the consecrated minority.

¹⁷ D'acci's work demonstrates the impact that the women's movement had on American popular culture and although she does not employ a Bourdieuan scheme, one might suggest that her evidence points to the way that the women's movement changed the space of possible positions in the field of (popular) culture in the US.

¹⁸ There is also some question as to her ability to establish rapport with teenagers with whom she has a teaching relationship. Griffiths, for example, conducts a study about female friendships in schools and claims that her position inside the classroom had a deleterious effect on the establishment of rapport and that this made her position ambiguous. She therefore decided to meet with the girls on *their* invitation outside the classroom (cf. Griffiths, *Adolescent Girls and Their Friends: A Feminist Ethnography*, Aldershot: Avebury, 1995)

¹⁹ Griffiths does suggest that alternatively, the girls seeing that she and the teacher had 'careers' may have a positive countervailing effect. Again I find this patronizing and middle class. Unfortunately, a 'career' is not an option for the vast majority of women in Britain and who is to say that some of those girls may not get involved in other activities which have more of an emphasis on emancipation rather than simply equality, that she cannot foresee.

²⁰ It is worth pointing out that later Seiter revises her position in an account of a 'troubling interview' (1990).

²¹ This occurred after my interview with Andrea as we were travelling to a night club. See appendix one for Andrea's fan profile.

²² Where a lengthy quotation is used because of this traversing, I will indicate in a footnote the pattern codes that were used to select the quotation.

²³ See appendix two.

²⁴ See appendix five.

²⁵ Held at Loyola University.

²⁶ Which is ironic, because Susie studies Archaeology and knows considerably more about ancient burial sites than I do.

²⁷ See appendix six for 'The Reverse Snowball' chart – New Orleans

²⁸ Thus a discussion of the texts and an analysis of the genre will be woven into the fan accounts throughout this chapter.

²⁹ *The Horror of Dracula*, 1958; *The Brides of Dracula*, 1960; *Kiss of the Vampire*, 1962; *Dracula Prince of Darkness*, 1965; *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave*, 1968; *Taste the Blood of Dracula*, 1970; *Vampire Lovers*, 1970; *Scars of Dracula*, 1971; *Lust for a Vampire*, 1971; *Countess Dracula*, 1971; *Vampire Circus*, 1971; *Dracula A.D. 1972*, 1972; *Captain Kronos*, *Vampire Hunter*, 1972; *Twins of Evil*, 1972; *The Satanic Rites of Dracula*, 1973

³⁰ For a discussion of Hammer's specific place in British cultural life see David Pirie's *Heritage of Horror*. He argues that '[i]t certainly seems to be arguable on commercial, historical and artistic grounds that the horror genre, as it has been developed in this country by Hammer and its rivals, remains the only staple cinematic myth which Britain can properly claim as its own, and which relates to it in the same way as the western does to America' (1973: 10).

³¹ This quotation is not intended as a discussion of *Frankenstein*. It is offered as an account of Dracula's cultural transformation. But it is impossible to disentangle it from her comments about *Frankenstein* without losing meaning.

³² Although it may explain the vehemence which fans displayed in not wanting Cruise to play the vampire Lestat in the film. He did not appear to possess the personal qualities, according to the fans and Rice herself, to make a successfully believable Lestat. Rather than demonstrating the fans are confusing fictional characters and screen persona's, it may suggest that fans are aware that stars and actors are typecast.

³³ This large section of Karen's transcript has been quoted because it traverses two initial codes and within those it traverses secondary pattern codes. The quotation addresses both issues of engagement and critical distance and therefore demonstrates the complexity of the fan's approach to her favourites. Initial code: text; secondary codes: favourites, reading strategy – critical assessment of vampire characteristics. Initial code self; secondary codes: sense of, vampire relates to, vampire differences from.

³⁴ While all of the female fans interviewed in Britain considered dressing the part of the vampire the central activity of their fandom, in the USA the same unanimity is not found. For instance, Diane seldom dressed as a vampire and Lisa did so only on special occasions, such as the Memnoch Ball.

³⁵ Yet the body-as-discursive-product also seems unable to account for *feeling* pain. Butler addresses such anxieties when she writes:

The critic might [...] seek assurances that this abstracted theorist will admit that there are [...] differences that can be conceded without reference to 'construction' [...] To concede the undeniability of "sex" or its "materiality" is always to concede some version of "sex", some formation of "materiality". Is the discourse in and through which that concession occurs [...] not itself formative of the very phenomenon that it concedes? To claim that discourse is formative is not to claim that it originates, causes, or exhaustively composes that which it concedes; rather it is to claim that there is no reference to a pure body which is not at the same time a further formation of that body (1999: 240).

While it is difficult to disagree with the notion that our bodies are as we understand them, or to find fissures in the impenetrability of Butler's logic, nevertheless a certain unease remains which is shared by other feminists. Lynda Birke for instance has this to say about the body-as-discursive approach, 'it fails to pay much heed to the body's interior and its processes; and secondly, it does not sufficiently address bodily development' (1999: 43).

³⁶ This lengthy quote gives full expression to the kinds of things many of the women fans said of their writing. It traverses three initial codes and three pattern secondary codes. These are as follows: initial code: text; pattern code: vampire characteristics; tertiary code: vampire feelings. Initial code: self; pattern code: body; tertiary code: transformation. Initial code: fan activity; pattern code: writing; tertiary code transformation/moment of.

³⁷ This quotation demonstrates the complex relationship between fandom, identity and social network. It traverses the following codes: Initial code: self; secondary pattern codes: sense of; relationships; vampire engagement; transformation. Initial code: text; secondary pattern codes: vampire characteristics; favourites; dislikes; reading strategies. Initial code: friendship/family; secondary pattern code: relationships; influences; friendships through fandom. Initial code: fan activity; secondary pattern codes: writing; self; friendships; transformation.

³⁸ No page numbers are available on the document of the conferences proceedings holding this chapter.

³⁹ Bourdieu argues '[w]ithout ever being a direct reflection of them, the internal struggles depend for their outcome on the correspondence they may have with the external struggles between the classes (or between the fractions of the dominant class) and on the reinforcement which one group or another may derive from them [...] When the new comers are not disposed to enter the cycle of simple reproduction [...] they cannot succeed without the help of external changes. These may be political breaks, such as revolutionary crisis, which change the power relations within the field (the 1848 revolution strengthened the dominated pole, causing writers to shift, very temporarily no doubt, to the left, i.e. towards "social art")' (1993: 58)

⁴⁰ Of course, all fans are ordinary audiences for some cultural output (and vice-versa) and in this way the distinction is blurred. However, I maintain that fandom is a distinct position in the field of culture which participates in debates about cultural value.

⁴¹ As I have argued in Chapter Five, vampire fans do not engage in Manichaeian-style identifications and are acutely aware of the dualistic character of the contemporary gothic vampire.

⁴² Perhaps they understand better than the fan club, the commercial benefits accrued from generating this kind of fan interest.

⁴³ Advertised in *The Savage Garden* (1997) without prices listed and also in *The Time Picayune* (Sunday, 9th February, 1997)

⁴⁴ In contrast, the LVG travelled to New Orleans in October 1997 to go to the ball. One fan wrote about the trip for the LVG's journal *The Chronicles*, 'Thus we entered (deep breath) "The Ninth Annual Gathering of the Coven of Anne Rice's Vampire Lestat Fan Club". Ms. Rice, never being one to miss out on the merchandise angle, there were a selection of T-shirt designs and signed posters to mark the event' (1997: 14). This comment begins to indicate the LVG's own sets of positions are in line with the 'autonomous' principles.

⁴⁵ Newletters after early 1997 are entitled *The Savage Garden*.

⁴⁶ In the Garden District alone (where the properties are large) Rice owned the following properties in 1997: her own home, another house, St. Elizabeth orphanage, and a local chapel. I was also told repeatedly of the controversy between Rice and Al Copeland over the building of his restaurant 'Straya's' in the Garden District. Melinda tells me during one of our conversations that 'she is having a fit because Al Copeland built his place on the spot where she last saw Lestat'.

⁴⁷ See 'The Rice Versus Copeland fracas' by James Gill in *The Times Picayune*, February, 9th, 1997.

⁴⁸ The ARVLFC is not the only fan club that has direct endorsements from the object of fandom who is also the producer of the texts which fans engage in, nor it is the only one to receive financial support from the object of fandom. See Abercrombie and Longhurst (1998) for a discussion of the mode of fandom.

⁴⁹ The president of the British Vampyre Society

⁵⁰ Recall from the previous chapter that it was the president of the British Vampyre Society who neglected to pass on the writings of Dee's close friend to the Dracula Society for centennial publication.

⁵¹ A typical LGV newsletter indicating in advance dates of meetings and AGM's can be seen in appendix seven.

⁵² In these times of deregulation in Europe and commercial broadcasting models replacing public service models across the globe, it is the common sense of today that media output should be profitable and competitive (cf. Freedman, 1998)

⁵³ The external world of politics imposed itself on this scene with the lead up to the introduction of the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act, which made 'raves' illegal. While the act criminalized the rave scene, Osgerby suggests that 'the Act was a gift to the biggest promoters (1998: 191) who 'staged fully licensed and very profitable events' (192). In contrast, those who had adopted the autonomous values of partying-for-partying's sake, shifted from this autonomous position and made links with another group who were under threat from the Bill - the New Age Travellers. Osgerby argues, 'links between the two groups steadily grew [...] [and] brought a fusion between the rave and travellers scene' (190).

Appendix One:

FAN PROFILES

BRITAIN:

Dee: Age: 29.
Marital status: widowed with children.
Qualifications: two 'O' levels.
Occupation: full-time mum.
City and country of residence: Blackpool, England.
Club membership: The British Vampyre Society, The Dracula Society Member, The Vampire Guild.
Favourite vampire fiction: *The Hunger*, *Vampire Chronicles* and *The Lost Boys*.
Favourite vampire: changes with mood.
Nationality: British.
Ethnic group: white.

Dee is the fan who put me in touch with Jane who I did not interview but who put me in touch with the London Vampire Group. Dee is not confident about her writing skills, but writes book reviews for The Dracula Society. Dee dresses in vampiric black and styles her hair vampirically. She used to be a Goth, but about eight years ago moved towards a more vampiric look and has been interested in vampires since adolescence.

Lea: Age: 26.
Marital status: lives with partner.
Qualifications: HND in Graphic Design.
Occupation: Trainee optical technician
City and country of residence: Blackburn, England.
Club membership: none at the moment.
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles*, *The Lost Boys*.
Favourite vampire: Lestat from the *Vampire Chronicles*.
Nationality: British.
Ethnic group: white

Lea dresses in vampiric black outside of work. She is a good friend of Cheryl whom she met through their common interest in vampires. She has been interested in vampires since childhood and has written several vampire tales.

Cheryl: Age: 24.
Marital status: single.
Qualifications: BSc (Hons) Applied Chemistry.
Occupation: Paint chemist.
City and country of residence: Blackburn, England.
Club membership: none at the moment.
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles* and *Carmilla*.
Favourite vampire: Louis from the *Vampire Chronicles*.
Nationality: British
Ethnic group: white.

Lea always dresses in black, but it takes on more of a vampiric edge outside of work. She has been interested in vampires since adolescence and writes vampire short stories and poetry.

Pam: Age: 41
Marital status: married with children.
Qualifications: none.
Occupation: pharmacy assistant.
City and country of residence: near Andover, England.
Club membership: none.
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles* and *The Lost Boys*.
Favourite vampire: Louis followed by Lestat from the *Vampire Chronicles*.
Nationality: British.
Ethnic group: white.

Pam dresses in antique black and dark purple clothes outside of work. She and Janet have been very close friends since childhood and have been interested in vampires since then. She would like to believe that vampires are real, particularly the vampires of Anne Rice's creation.

Janet: Age: 41.
Marital status: divorced with children.
Qualifications: none.
Occupation: shop assistant.
City and country of residence: near Andover, England.
Club membership: none.
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles* and *The Lost Boys*.
Favourite vampire: Lestat followed by Louis from the *Vampire Chronicles*.
Nationality: British.
Ethnic Group: white.

Janet dresses in antique black clothes outside of work. She would like to meet a real vampire and thinks that Lestat is fantastic. Like Pam she finds it hard to believe that Rice's vampire are not real.

Karen: Age: 33.
Marital status: single with one child.
Qualifications: two cse's.
Occupation: aspiring writer.
City and country of residence: near Wendover, England.
Club membership: The British Vampire Society, The London Vampire Group and had just joined the Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club in New Orleans.
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles*.
Favourite vampire: Armand from the *Vampire Chronicles*.
Nationality: British.
Ethnic group: white.

Karen always dresses in black and usually dons caps fashioned as vampire fangs and yellow contact lenses. She used to be a punk, but has been interested in vampires since

adolescence and has been dressing as a vampire for six or seven years. Karen has written two full-length vampire novels and many short stories.

Jesse: Age: 19.
Marital status: single.
Qualifications: none.
Occupation: not applicable
City and Country of residence: near Wendover, England.
Club membership: The British Vampire Society, The London Vampire Group.
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles*.
Favourite vampire: all of the vampires from the *Vampire Chronicles*.
Nationality: British.
Ethnic group: white.

Jesse has been interested in vampires for a few years and always dresses in black. She knows about the clubs and activities through Karen, both living in a small village near Wendover.

NEW ORLEANS:

Andrea: Age: 33
Marital status: boyfriend.
Qualifications: high school diploma
Occupation: administrative assistant at the university hospital.
City of residence: was born in Chicago and grew up in California but moved to New Orleans because of her interest in vampires.
Club membership: Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club ex-member.
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles*.
Favourite vampire: depends on mood, sometimes Louis and sometimes Lestat.
Nationality: American
Ethnic group: white.

Andrea has been interested in vampires since childhood. She dresses in antique clothes outside of work and would prefer to dress this way permanently. She makes period costumes for herself and younger brother to wear to balls and parades. She lives with her younger brother. Andrea is the fan that I had an argument with about racism after our interview on the way to a night club. Susie and I left their party on arrival at the club.

Dana: Age: 38.
Marital status: married with one child.
Qualifications: BA (Hons) Liberal Arts
Occupation: Executive secretary at the university hospital.
City of residence: Born in New York but moved to New Orleans because of her interest in vampires about eight years ago.
Club membership: none
Favourite vampire fiction: Frank Langella's *Dracula*, Bela Lugosi's *Dracula* and the *Vampire Chronicles*.
Favourite vampire. Frank Langella and Bela Lugosi as *Dracula*.
Nationality: American.

Ethnic group: white.

Dana was my key contact in New Orleans, without whom I would have found it difficult to contact fans. She was very helpful and while Susie and I were in New Orleans she showed us the vampire sights, including a mansion in the swamps where part of *Interview With the Vampire* was filmed. Things ended rather abruptly when her hound bit through my hand. Dana has been interested in vampires since childhood and always dressed in black.

Diane: Age: 40.
Marital status: Married, no children.
Qualifications: BA (Hons) French and Spanish.
Occupation: Assistant manager, Garden District Book Shop.
City of residence: Moved to New Orleans several years ago.
Club membership: The Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles* particularly *The Queen of the Damned*. As a teenager she loved *Dark Shadows*.
Favourite vampire: Used to be Louis but now is Lestat.
Nationality: American.
Ethnic group: White.

Diane is one of the book shop fans who is not club personnel but is very close to them and collaborate with them for events such as Rice's book signings or the Club annual ball. I have called her an 'official fan' because of this role and because of the manner in which she spoke about her position. She rarely if ever dresses in costume and all of her fan activities are connected to Anne Rice's relationship with the shop. Her interest began during adolescence.

Hannah: Age: 23
Marital status: is married to Melinda.
Qualifications: BSc Commercial Arts.
Occupation: Computer specialist at the university hospital.
City of residence: born in Seattle, Hannah had recently moved to New Orleans because of her interest in Melinda and their shared interest in vampires.
Club membership: ex member of The Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club. E-mail Dagger Crew and Internet fan sites.
Favourite vampire fiction: *Vampire Chronicles*.
Favourite vampire: Louis, Maurius and Armand.
Nationality: American.
Ethnic group: Japanese American.

Hannah is The Keeper of the Archives of all the speculative stories posted at Alt.books>Anne-Rice and writes speculative stories also. She has been involved in 'silly spec writing' with Melinda in which the vampires from the *Chronicles* meet up with the cast of the film *Interview With the Vampire*. Hannah always dresses in black.

Melinda Age: 31
Marital status: married to Hannah.
Qualifications: BA (Hons) Liberal Arts
Occupation: unemployed, aspiring writer.

City of residence: Originally from Colorado, but moved to New Orleans because of her interest in vampires.

Club membership: ex-member of The Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club. E-mail Dagger Crew and Internet fan sites.

Favourite vampire fiction: Vampire Chronicles.

Favourite vampire: Armand followed by Lestat.

Nationality: American.

Ethnic group: white.

Melinda is the fan who told me about having her unofficial tours of the city closed down by Kith and Kin. She has written several vampire novels and is working on her first 'serious' novel. She also participates in spec writing on the Internet. She will dress in antique vampiric clothes for special occasions, but her main activity is writing. She has been interested in vampires since childhood.

Shirin

Age: 48.

Marital status: Married.

Qualifications: BA Drama and History.

Occupation: Freelance publisher and writer.

City of residence: Was born in New Orleans but finds it very parochial and would like to be able to afford to live in New York where she has been on holiday many times.

Club membership: ex-member of The Anne Rice Vampire Lestat Fan Club.

Favourite vampire fiction: She loved *Forever Knight* as a teenager but likes anything with a sympathetically portrayed vampire.

Favourite vampire: Nick Knight followed by Louis from the *Chronicles*.

Nationality: American.

Ethnic group: Sicilian American.

Shirin publishes her own vampire journals and is currently writing a non-fiction book on 'human vampires' and the 'Goth scene'. She has been a vampire fan since childhood.

Appendix Two:

Advert:

Are you a woman who loves vampire movies?

Do you belong to a vampire society or fan club?

If the answers to these questions are 'yes' I would like to hear from you. I am conducting research on the appeal that vampires hold for women and I would like to hear your views on the subject. If you would like to participate in this research please contact:

Milly Williamson
School of Information and Communication Studies
The University of North London
Ladbroke House 62 - 66 Highbury Grove
London N5 - 2AD

Or telephone 0171 753 5031/ e-mail: lx fzwilliam@unl.ac.uk

Appendix Three:

WOMEN VAMPIRE FANS QUESTIONNAIRE

Section One: Personal Details

Name: _____

Address: _____

Telephone number: _____

Age: _____

Occupation: _____

Nationality: _____

Please list any educational qualifications you have:

Are you: (please circle)

single
married
other

Section Two: Vampires and You

In this section I am trying to find out about your vampiric activities and preferences. Hopefully we can discuss some of these things in more detail when we meet for the interview. Please feel free to leave any questions blank if you do not wish to answer them.

1. Please list any vampire fan clubs and/or societies that you are a member of and the length of time you have been a member:

Club/Society	Length of membership
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

2. Please give a brief description of the sorts of activities you get involved in as a member of the clubs/societies:

_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____
_____	_____

3. When you first became interested in vampires were you between the ages: (please circle)

- 5-10 years
- 10-15 years
- 15-20 years
- 20- 25 years
- 25-30 years
- 30-35 years
- 35-40 years
- 40-45 years
- over 45 years

4. What is your favourite vampire fiction: (please circle)

- films
- books
- television programmes
- impossible to choose
- other (please specify) _____

5. Do you have a favourite vampire film? (please circle) yes no

5a. If so, please write the title here: _____

6. Do you have a favourite vampire book? (please circle) yes no

6a. If so , please write the title here: _____

7. A favourite vampire T.V. programme? (please circle) yes no

7a. If so, please write the title here: _____

8. Do you have a favourite piece of vampire fiction that is not a film, book or television programme? (please circle) yes no

8a. If so, please write the title here and indicate what it is: _____

9. Do you collect any items related to vampire fiction? (please circle)

yes no

9a. If so, please list the types of items here.

_____	_____
_____	_____

10. Do you have a favourite vampire? (please circle) yes no

10a. If so, please write the name here: _____

11. Are there any vampires you don't like? (please circle) yes no

11a. If so, please write the name/s here: _____

12. Do you have any friends who are also vampire fans? (please circle)

yes no

12a. Are they: (please circle)

mostly female

mostly male

both

Appendix Four:

Melinda's Transcript: first five pages

1. Melinda: I like Armand, because he is the true depth of all of them. He is the culmination of it. He was snatched from his people at a very young age and taken to the (), and I won't go into that. I've written stories about it and I will send you copies of them. I've written a series of letters from Armand to Lestat, as a part of a story, and it was all about Armand's background and people, because Lestat was saying, ok I cannot believe anything about you. I mean, really (), but...alright. So I took it on myself to write it as a series of letters to Lestat about his background and his history. The details are there, so that's my interpretation of it. Goes back when he was six years old he was placed in the () and he was taken out by (). And the child...Anne is very shoddy in her research. She gets just enough to really screw it up (). Does she know what Louis' middle name is? No, but I do. So for Armand to have been taken from the area that he was taken, it would have had to have been by the (). But he couldn't have been questioned. He would have had to have been (). So but she had him worshipping the Christian God at a very young age, and so I had to figure out how all that, you know, that's one of the great challenges of a spec writer, which we'll go into later, is to cover up all of Anne's historical mistakes. So we had the people that kidnapped him teach him about Christianity. And then of course continues the kid all to hell and back because they then broke all of the sacraments that they taught him he had to obey, or else he'd go to Hell. And then of course they sold him to a (), where acts of flesh, of the carnal courses, especially between children and adults are forbidden in the eyes of God, and yet this is what he was a subject to, and so if you just teach a child, an innocent thing, what is good and what is bad, and then you place him in an area which is exclusively bad, children always take it upon themselves to take the blame for everything. They rationalise, they think this must be my fault somehow. So he had that mentality and all of a sudden he thinks he's the worst of bad, and he deserves what's happening to him, and he loses the will to live and we get into all that, and then Marius brings him out. And Marius brings him to this world of light and harmony and support and love and nurturing, and in a little kid's mind, who has been placed in a religious context, he would then...at least as far as my interpretation goes...from hell to heaven. And so he was taken from the absolute depths to the highest of love and compassion of life, who he thought was nothing more or less than a god. And so he continues this way until he's seventeen years old and then Marius turns around and says, guess what, I'm really a vampire, but that's ok, I'd like you to be a vampire too because I want you to be my companion forever. You are the one that I've chosen. Now imagine...Armand meets the chosen of God, alright, the reason why is because he truly believes that Marius was in some form, God. Imagine what a child would feel like at this point, having known nothing but the depths and then the heights, and then you are the chosen. I pick you. I will give you all of my secrets. I make you my heir. So for six months, he's living this, now as a vampire and he has Marius's undivided attention, which is what he's always wanted, and now he is worthy because he has been fighting for this worthiness, and for this place of honour, for this redemption. And now he finally has, and the only thing then that is denied him is those who must be

kept, the secret of that. That's all. Everything else he knows. Six months later, Santino takes him and puts him literally into hell, worshipping Satan, in the depths, in the dirt, in the caves below Rome, watching Marius go off like a torch. The depths of Marius going down into hell, literally. And you tell me that's not a romantic character? You see, she covers it so briefly, in like two pages, and that's all you get of Armand's background in four books! Two pages of background. But you have to take all this and go with it if you're gonna explore the character at all.

2. Milly: But do you think that that would be a more general reason why people would like Armand because...because he's not sketched in, but because it's obvious that he's been through this, or...
3. Melinda: Yes, he is a very compassionate character, but he is also the depth of mystery, and women love mystery and amour, he is seduction. He is the unknown. He is the personification of what is unknown. I mean, he is sex. There is no way around that. Lestat is glamour, Louis is sorrow, but Armand is seduction, and that's why he calls to so many. But underneath that seduction, if you unravel the mystery, what you find in there is a broken heart. Oh you've got to love it! It's something that you can't escape from. That's what I think that is his appeal, is that he's running around, but you know that if you just... you're the one that he needs, you're the one that's gonna save him, you're the one that's going to heal him and bring him back into the living. It's a character whose () is very powerful, and that's what...you don't get that in Lestat, because Lestat is known. I mean, you know everything about this guy. And Louis, nobody really cares, because for the most part she dropped him. Louis represented her pain as a mother in grief, and she came to despise the character because she wanted to put the grief and pain behind her. She focused on Lestat because Lestat is who she wanted to be. So you hardly know anything about Louis, and she never made him intriguing enough that people would care that much. Now, there are...don't get me wrong...Louis fanatics are abounding, but I don't think it's for the same reasons that you would go for someone like Armand.
4. Milly: So I wonder, do you think that Anne Rice's fans see her as the () of the one () as the special one, to come out of the depths of the ()?
5. Melinda: Through her works or personally?
6. Milly: Personally, because there's a huge personal attachment to her, not to her characters, but to her.
7. Melinda: I think that this work speaks to so many, and she as the creator of this work can be seen as the representative, almost as a guru of sorts. She is the one who saw these visions and who was able to realise them in print and bring them forth to the masses, and so if she's not...the messenger of this, who is? Except for the characters themselves, but is that a place that we really want to go to, I don't think so. You know.
8. Milly: So tell me about the spec writing then.

9. Melinda: The specs are something that Anne hates. I'll tell you right now, she hates them, because she's very possessive about her characters, and would prefer that others not write about them. But it's done anyway, so give it up, and there's no way you can control this. The only author I know that ever tried to stop it was Anne (), and not only did she get a singularly negative reputation amongst the internet fans, but as far as I know, the stories within her world are going as strong as ever, in fact redoubled, simply as a backlash, and now they're just underground. You know, all you have to do is ask, oh where do I get this? They say here's my private little archive that nobody knows about, and there's all the stories, so you can't stop it. Fortunately we've never gotten a cease and desist from Random House, and they certainly could if they wanted to, but right now they haven't, and what we do...again, if you wanna call it a little clique, it's an open clique though, it's a group of us that got together and we started writing stories. The first one to do it...
10. Milly: Was this all on the Internet?
11. Melinda: Uh huh, Alt.books>Anne-Rice. The first one to do it...it was right before, about six months before Memnoch came out, and they wrote what was called a (spec) to fiction, which was gee, I wonder what Memnoch's gonna be all about, because all they knew was that it was about heaven and hell and Lestat supposedly meeting the devil. And that's all we knew. So they took this concept and said, you know, here's a story about what it might be, I hope you like it. And it turns out to be one of the most brilliantly written pieces of literature I've ever read in my life. Brilliant. Unfinished, unfortunately because one of the...there was I think two writers, and one of them unfortunately came into a personal hardship and wasn't able to finish it, but I was able to lead the team, and in fact (xxxxx), that I was telling you about, was one of the team. It actually grew to be a team of four writers, and then one of the originals who had to drop out, so I got to know the team that had written this extremely well, and more talent than...I'm humbled. So I respectfully requested to write the ending of it, because it was left open. And there's one major work called Memnoch the spec, and the spec is short for speculative, and that's unfinished, but afterwards, there was a whole slew of short stories, which took where the novel left off, and kept going and then concluded all the little loose ends they left inside the novel. And so I asked to write the very final story of it all, of all of the short stories, and it was one of the very first things I ever posted to the internet, as a work of written fiction. And I still think it's one of the best things I ever did, and I wrote it in tandem with (her friend), you know, became my cyber sister, because we were completing each other's sentences at this point. It's an amazing piece of work. The body of work is, I would say, three to four novels long, of which I only wrote the last chapter. But that inspired me to write my own novels. And again, none of us acknowledge that Memnoch, Anne's Memnoch ever happened. We just...no, no, no. Now, as far as the ghost story goes, works for me. Roger the ghost, cool stuff. Lestat wasn't in it, and I'm not even gonna discuss the rest of the characters.
12. Milly: You didn't like it then? We think that's what you're saying...we're just trying to get it clear, just in case.
13. Melinda: Well, I'm the one that started calling it kitty litter. But anyway, so we all

based our work off of *Body Thief*, and went forward from there, and so I wrote my first novel, which is called *Shadow Dancers*, and it's all on my web page if you want to see it. It's a work I'm proud of, I've got to admit. I'm not proud of a lot of what I do, you know, you always go back and you're very critical about your work. *Shadow Dancers* I'm proud of, and it isn't *Memnoch*. It's not quite as good. It is good, it's gotten great reviews, and I've...for a while there I was outselling Anne. More people were downloading this than were buying her book, which I thought was (). She has since outsold me three times around the moon, but for just a little while there I actually outsold her, which I thought was kinda funny. Of course, it's all free so, you know...I was just keeping track of how many hits I was getting on the page. And that was kinda fun.

14. Milly: So ok, I'm just trying to get a picture here...so, what you've got here is a group of people on the internet who are writing their own stories, use Anne Rice's characters, which she disapproves of, because she wants to control those characters. At the same time, her characters are owned by Warner Brothers. She won't write her characters anymore, that's what I was told last night, she won't write anymore about those characters from the *Vampire Chronicles* because she doesn't own them.
15. Melinda: Not what I heard.
16. Milly: Ok, tell me what you heard.
17. Melinda: Ok, now that is true. Warner Brothers does own the rights to the first four novels. As far as I understand, she sold them part and parcel, so visually speaking, she does not own her characters any longer. However, the rights just reverted back to her as far as commercial and marketing, which is why she started the tours, which is why she's starting her Café Lestat, which is why she is starting the T-shirts and the lunchboxes and God only knows what else she's doing because she just now got the rights back to do it.
18. Milly: When's now? Sort of last month or...
19. Melinda: Until last October.
20. Milly: Ok, so until then Warner Brothers owned the characters?
21. Melinda: I think Warner Brothers only owned the visual options. Random House now owns the literary options. I think that it's two separate things. But I do know that she did sell to Warner Brothers the visual options for the films of the first four books. Ok, and because of the...again, rumour has it, from what I understand, because of the stunt that she pulled with Tom Cruise, she's...of course she was banned from the set of *Interview*... They took her script away, and now they won't allow her to develop the scripts any longer for any of the others, because she antagonises some of the powerful men in Hollywood. You know, not really quite thinking there. But that's all rumour anyway, though I can't confirm any of that. I do know of course, that she just sold *Ramses* to James Cameron for three million dollars, and her preference for () is Antonio Banderas. But she's not able to have any influence over that, and Antonio works for one group of

people, James Cameron is with another group of people and so it's not clear if Antonio will be able to start. But that's the last thing that she did as far as Hollywood is concerned. Lots of rumours about casting on the internet, lots of rumours about all of this stuff.

22. Milly: So how many of you all have websites?

23. Melinda: All of us.

24. Milly: How many is all of us?

25. Melinda: Oh, oh ok. Now, out of the little clique of writers, maybe of the core group there's six of us. And I hate to say that we're a clique, because we are not exclusive. We love writers. Everybody who wants to write, we try to encourage it as much as possible. But there is a group that's been there longer, and we form a friendship.

26. Milly: Who are they?

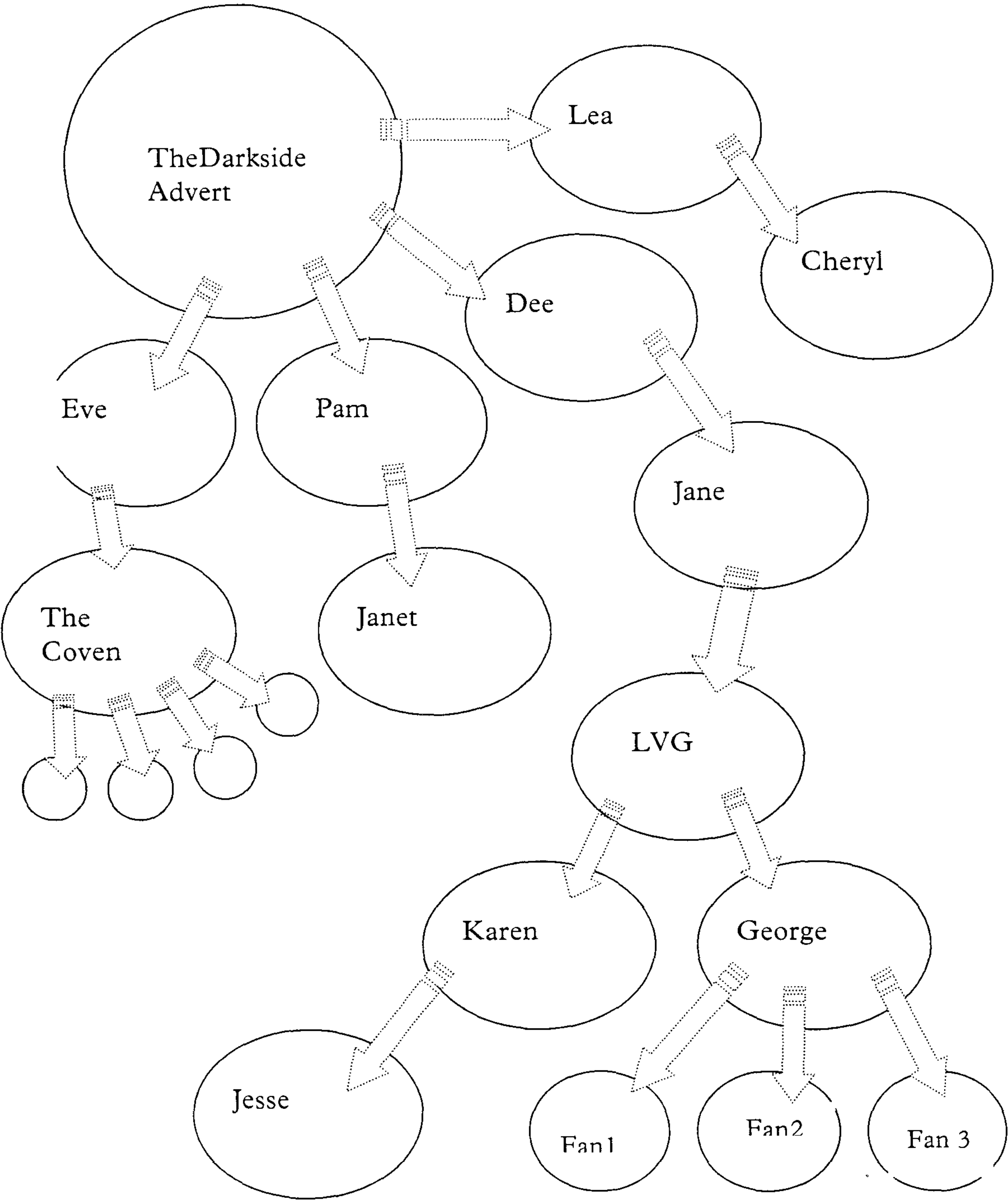
27. Melinda: Who are they?... (xxxxxx)...

28. Milly: Oh, you don't have a title for the group?

29. Melinda: Oh no, well we call ourselves the Dagger Crew. But the only reason why they call us that is because we're also, in the middle of writing all these wonderful novels, we've also started up a role playing game, which is based loosely on the premise of what happens if the gang of vampires meets the crew that was forming vampire Lestat, and put them all together and muck them all around. We all take one character and we play that as an interactive role playing game, and then as people dropped out we took on more and more characters, and so at this point I am Antonio Bandaras, Tom Cruise and Armand. (xxxxxx) is playing Lestat, Santino... somebody else I think. Hannah, who is my roommate, she is playing Marius currently. (xxxxxx) plays Brad Pitt, and she's the one who started Memnoch the spec, you know, Memnoch is her baby, she is the best writer on the internet, bar none. You know, we just... we've got this huge group together and four of us are actually going to be moving here and living with each other by the end of August. And we met from all over the world, and one of the Dagger Crew actually lives in Sweden. But we all met on the Internet, we all got together, we all found a common interest, we all found a common talent, and we said cool, let's go. So we all have our own web pages, we all are very deeply into this as far the characters, but it's not Anne Rice. It's these people speak to us... these characters speak to us. Now are they alive? I don't know... is Romeo and Juliet alive? You know, there's a concept and there's a core in there that is very romantic and very appealing, and these concepts are alive. These... the nerves that they touch within the human heart gives them a certain life. I mean if I walked down the street and I actually meet Lestat, ok I'm gonna pass out. I don't think he's that kind of alive, but as in as much as any literary character can be immortal, these characters meet the qualifications just as Romeo and Juliet do. Romeo and Juliet are eternal, because they are basic to the human heart. So that's what captured us and drove us forward. Has still captured our interest and it's been two years. I've never

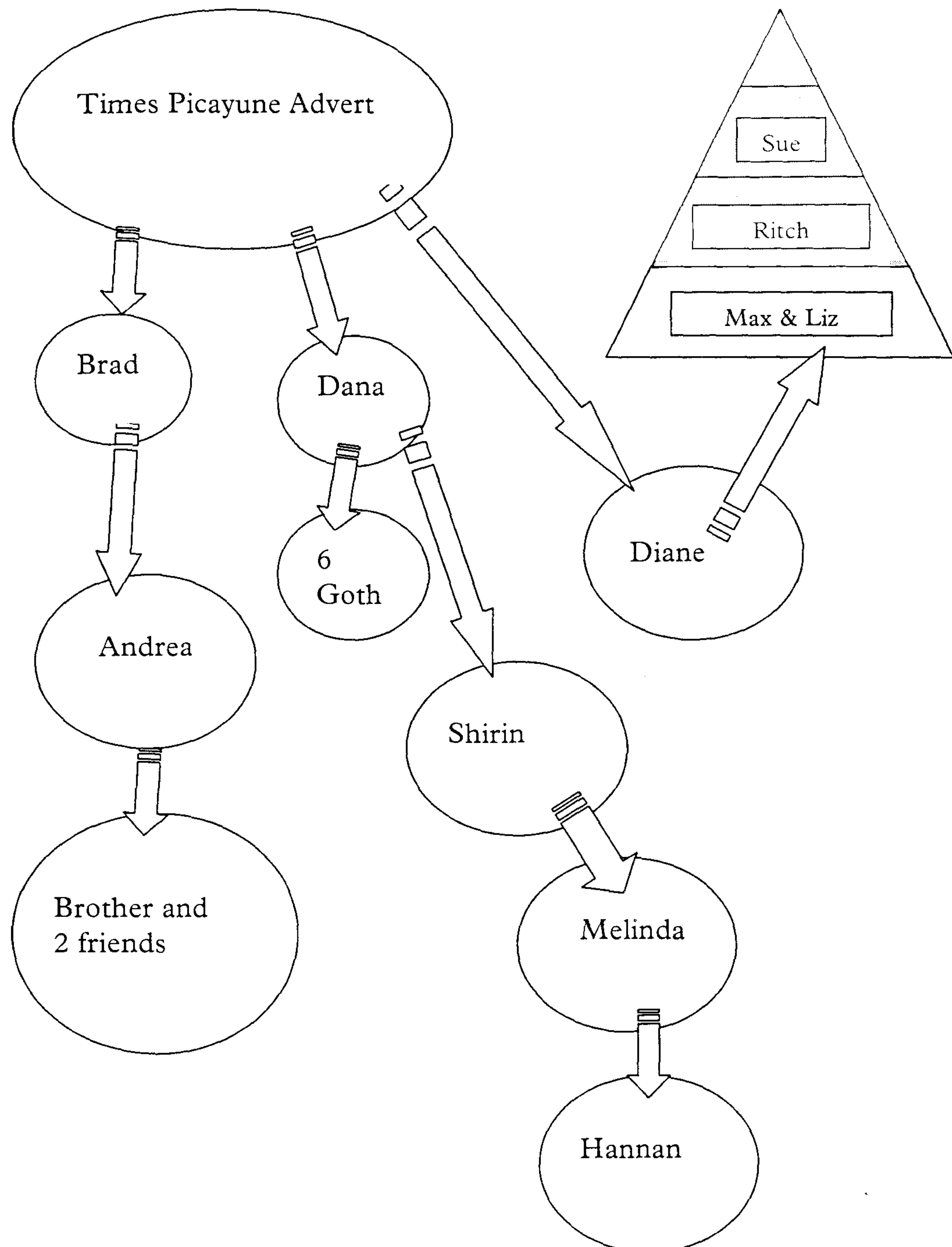
Appendix Five:

Britain: Meeting the Fans Snowball Chart



Appendix Six:

New Orleans: The Reverse Snowball Effect



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